The Embedded Self

An investigation into moral thinking and thinkers

by

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Contents

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the nature of moral thinking and thus to arrive at some conclusions as to the nature of moral thinkers. My starting point is that investigation of the ways we think in moral terms, particularly with respect to the way that the truth of thoughts constrains the claims we can make in moral discourse. That is, I want to start with the ways of thinking and the sorts of claims we make in moral terms, and see what those ways of thinking and claims tell us about the sorts of people we are and the environment we find ourselves in. This approach depends on a picture of our interaction and connection with our environment in conceptual terms that allows us to investigate one part of this interaction, our language and thought, and use it to give us information about the other parts of the interaction, the thinkers and what is thought about. The important element of this interaction is that it is an interaction responsive to the truth of the beliefs we hold and the claims we make. This requires me to defend the thesis that moral language and thought can be candidates for truth, and that the truth they respond to is not some particular truth relative to moral discourse, but truth *tout court*, as it applies to all discourses. Using the distinction I claim is made in moral language and thought between moral judgments and their truth I show that we need to be able to recognise moral agents as engaged or embedded in a network of personal relationships that are made up of commitments, responsibilities and expectations. It is these personal relationships that provide both justification and motivation for moral action and this is sufficient for morality.

This thesis is dedicated to

Derek, David and Peter

Introduction: The self, an identity problem

"Who was that lady I saw you with last night?", runs the old joke. "That was no lady, that was my wife". When talking to people and thinking about people we assume that we are capable of identifying and re-identifying them. Terms like `that lady', `I', `you' and `my wife' all identify people, and the last, at least, re-identifies someone. The joke works at all on the assumption that the respondent can both identify the person he was with last night and re-identify her as the same person as his wife. It also assumes, though this may not be so immediately obvious, that he can identify himself as both the person now addressed, and the person who was somewhere last night and that his interlocutor can do the same. So, in order to talk about and think about people, we need to be able to identify and re-identify them. We need to be able to recognise people and answer such questions as `Who is that?' We also need to be able to do this when the person in question is ourselves. We do not usually ask such questions about ourselves as `Who am I?', `What do I mean by `myself'?' or `What is it that is really me?', except, perhaps, in moments of crisis. Our very use of such terms as `I', `me', `my' and `mine', however, presuppose that we know who it is we are talking or thinking about.

In the past, philosophers have thought that in order to answer the question of how we identify and re-identify ourselves and others we need to know what the essence of being human is. To be able to identify and re-identify anything, people included, there must be something that remains the same throughout all changes, something that is that thing, regardless of what happens to it. So we must know what it is that counts as a person to be able to tell one person from another, and to re-identify people in general. As with physical objects in general, we believe we can identify persons through time, even though their characteristics change. There has often been a feeling, however, that the criteria we use to identify and re-identify

physical objects in general and other persons in particular are different from the way we identify ourselves.

It is argued that we identify physical objects and other persons by description of their characteristics and by their being linked to their past histories. Thus I identify the swivel chair in my lounge because it has in general terms the characteristics it had previously, that is it is in the same position as it was yesterday, is mostly black and has its cushion torn by the cat, and because I can trace its history. If, the next time I look at that chair it is green, or if someone could show me that, although it looked the same, it had been replaced by a replica, then I would not call it the same chair. Similarly with people, I re-identify them by physical description, behaviour, temperament and also by their having a continuous history. With people however, there is the added complication of the mental or psychological element, what we might be tempted to call the inner life, and with respect to each person's identification of himself it seems to be this that is important. When I identify myself, I do not seem to rely on a physical description, and the continuous history which plays its part in this identification does not seem to be the same sort of history as that I would use for the identity of physical objects. It is a history told from the inside not the outside. I do not seem to use external criteria to identify myself at all. It seems possible to be sure who I am by relying totally on internal evidence.

This contrast between the internal and the external view has lead people to take one of two positions on personal identity: that a person is identical with their body or with their mind. When we look initially at how we identify others it seems we use their bodily identity as a criterion. Witnesses identify criminals by whether they have the same body, by what they look like, I recognise my friend at a distance by her physical appearance. In general our experience of actual people leads us to believe that identity of the body goes with identity of person, although cases of multiple

personality disorder may cause problems for us.[1] So we appear to need the continuity and existence of a physical body to enable us to identify people. Yet intuitively we want to say that this is not enough. After all dead bodies are not people and we are at least willing to entertain the idea that a person might somehow change his body and yet still remain the same person. Thought experiments such as Descartes'[2] imagining himself without a body, Locke's[3] prince and cobbler, Putnam's[4] brain in a vat, Parfit's[5] teletransportation and Williams'[6] body swapping all appeal to our intuitions about how we would feel under such conditions. In using our intuitions we are often asked to put ourselves in the place of those in the thought experiment and think what things would be like. Descartes' Meditations are all told from the first person point of view, Parfit's and Williams examples explicitly ask us to consider things from the first person perspective, and although this is not the case for Locke or Putnam, nonetheless what seems to make such examples ones we could consider is the temptation to put ourselves in the place of the person described.

If we approach such thought experiments from the first person point of view, from the inside, then the temptation is to think that what counts when identifying and re-identifying people is how things look to them, and this is not in terms of physically identifying the body but more to do with their thoughts, memories, feelings, their history told from the inside. Thus it feels as if the internal view of the self is the essential one, and that it can perhaps be divorced from the external physical object

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[1]For discussion of how this can affect our concept of a person see Kathleen V Wilkes, *Real People: Personal Identity without Thought Experiments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) chapter

[2]René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

[3]John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, abridged and ed. by John W Yolton (London: J Dent, 1993) Chapter 27

[4]Hilary Putnam, *Realism, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) p. 1-21

[5]Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

[6]Bernard Williams, 'The Self and the Future' in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956-1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) pp. 46-63.

that is the body. Thought experiments and the ways in which we identify ourselves lead us in the direction of the mental criterion, to take selves to be mental entities that are contingently associated with particular bodies, but can perhaps exist without them or with other bodies. This idea is, of course, essential to such notions as life after death and re-incarnation which assume that the self can be associated with different bodies or with no body at all. There are, however, problems with taking the mental criterion, our memories, our character, our history told from the inside, as the essential criterion. Firstly, as Strawson points out, we cannot individuate a purely mental self as the subject of experience.[7] The conception of a set of mental attributes is derivative from the conception of a person as a whole. Secondly there are two problem with memories as a criterion: if I am only what I remember then if I forget that I have done something, it looks as if it was not I who did it, and do we count as memories only genuine memories or are apparent memories included as well? In fact, for both problems we need the bodily criterion. To have a concept of a continuing person through the bits of my history which I have forgotten, or when I was unconscious or asleep we need to identify me with my body. Of course, to the individual his stream of consciousness seems continuous, but he would surely agree that it was him who was unconscious on the operating table or asleep in the bed. If it was not, where did `he' go, or did `he' cease to exist for a time? To distinguish between genuine and apparent memories, we appear to need the bodily criterion. If I am wrong to identify myself as the child who got lost at the fair - that particular family story was something that happened to my sister - this is because the person who was lost was the one who has the `body' that was lost.

Further, if we take the picture of minds using or inhabiting bodies that motivates views such as Locke's in his example of the prince and the cobbler, we find that they are not as straightforward as they appear at first. If we extend Locke's example and

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[7]P F Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1979) Part 1, chapter 4.

suppose that the mind of the cobbler were in the prince's body, presumably Locke feels that we would identify the person who looked like the prince as the cobbler, because his memory, and perhaps his behaviour patterns, were the cobblers. But what happens if we push this story a bit further? What if we ask the person we have identified as the cobbler, on account of his mental attributes, to make or mend a pair of shoes? Will his hands have the required skill because the mind `directing' them has the knowledge of cobbling? Or would the person with the cobblers body do a better job? And how would the results of this experiment affect our identification of the people concerned? Perhaps neither of them could make or mend a pair of shoes. Would we then say that one had forgotten the skills of cobbling and the other had never learnt them, or *vice versa*? We might, of course, be inclined to think that the person who remembered what actions were needed to mend shoes would be able to retrain his new body to do the job, while the one whose body was trained for the job could not expect his body to teach him how to cobble. But even if the cobbler in the prince's body did take up cobbling as a practice again, would we say he was the *same* cobbler? It seems that for some of the attributes that make someone the person they are, we would have to count combined physical and mental attributes. Cobbling, playing the piano or driving the car do not appear to be either strictly physical or strictly mental attributes.

It looks as if neither the physical nor the mental criteria are enough on their own. To some extent we might be inclined to say that the person we are, the personality we develop, is formed by the experiences we have. Although I didn't have to develop certain skills, or political opinions, or moral or religious positions, yet the fact that I have developed the ones I have, that I have become the person I am, is due to the circumstances in which I have grown up, the experiences that have come my way. The cobbler need not have been a cobbler, he might have been a farmer, but surely he is as much a cobbler, as he is Joe Bloggs, father of two daughters, inhabitant of 23 Acacia Avenue and staunch supporter of the local Methodist church. All these

descriptions are (or may be) true of him, and if none of them actually applied to him, in what sense could we say he was the same person.

If this is the case, if the person someone is depends to some extent on the circumstances in which he or she has found themselves, then this seems to tie together the two ideas we came up with at first. The answer to who someone is seems to be an answer both to the question of what it is to be them rather than someone else, and what it is that enables us to identify and re-identify them. But neither of these ways of looking at the person can be seen independently of how they are situated and how they arrived there. A person is not something independent of the experiences he has had, even though those experiences were not forced on him. Moreover, those experiences are not just to do with the physical side of the person, although they come through the physical situations in which he finds himself. They also seem to be concerned with the social, legal, financial, moral, religious and any other types of situations in which he finds himself. All these contribute to making him the person he is, and I think there is a need to identify the individual, on different occasions, by his situation in these non-physical spheres. It is the location of the person, the self in some of these spheres that I want to explore in this thesis.

My exploration begins, however, from a different starting point to that stated above. Most of the above explorations of the self have started with the concept we have of a person and have either tried to analyse it, or to see how we would intuitively extend it in unusual cases. I also want to start with the concepts we have, so to speak, but I do not want to ask how we identify ourselves and others, nor even what conceptions we have of persons. Instead I want to find out, given that we do, in fact, identify ourselves and others, what are the necessary conditions for being able to do this. The approach to this problem that I want to use is through thought and language. We think and talk about people in all sorts of different ways. We attribute all sorts of properties to ourselves and other people: physical, mental, social, moral, religious and economic

properties. Every time we attribute a property to someone, we pick that person out and say something about them. It may be that occasionally we fail to pick out anything, as in Russell's example of `the present king of France'[8] when no such king exists, or as in `the archbishop of the Church of England', when there are two such archbishops. Apart from such cases, however, we do seem to succeed fairly often in picking people out in thought, and this seems to involve identifying them somehow, and identifying them in many different spheres. We talk about `the man over there', `the Prime Minister', `the local bank manager', `our parish priest' and `the person I owe money to'. So there are many types of discourses, many types of ways of thinking about people, and therefore contexts, in which we succeed in identifying people.

I will not be initially concerned, however, with how we identify ourselves and others in such discourses, although some indications of that may emerge. My general approach is to consider the discourses we use, the ways we have of thinking about ourselves and our environment, and ask what the conditions must be that allow us to think and talk in these ways, what constraints there are on such ways of thinking and talking, and hence how these constraints can show us what sort of things we are, what sorts of abilities we will need and what sort of situations we are bound to inhabit.

This approach may be worrying to some, since I am aiming to find out what sort of a world we are in and what sort of things may be found in it by looking at the language we use, and for those who feel that our language could be totally divorced from `the world' and its `contents', whatever they might be, such an approach would seem to be mistaken. I hope to justify this approach in my first chapter, by considering Frege's Context Principle and the guidance it may give us in this respect. There I consider two pictures of the way that conceptualising subjects, their concepts and what I will loosely call the world may be related. I maintain that a picture which allows the

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[8]Bertrand Russell, `On Denoting' in *The Philosophy of Language*, 2nd edn., Ed. by A.P. Martinich (Oxflrd: Oxford University Press, 1990) pp. 203-211.

subject and his concepts to be independent of the world is incoherent and that our concepts are developed in response to the world and our place in it. Because of this, I argue that we can use our concepts, our ways of thinking about things to tell us something about what we are like and what the world we inhabit is like. To do this we will need some way of assessing how our concepts work, and this is found in the distinctions we make in thinking about things, between how things seem to us and how they really are. That is, I think that the distinction between our judgments and the truth of them is an instrument we can use to tell us something about the nature of those judgments and how they can be made. The truth judgment distinction is something that, although I have denied that it makes sense when applied wholesale to all of our concepts, can nevertheless be very useful when applied within our conceptualisation.

This might be thought to raise three problems. The first is that if truth is to do with how our thoughts relate to the world, we cannot get outside our thoughts to check if they do so. Various responses to this have been to try to produce theories of truth which will explain how we can apply the concept true. My approach is to admit quite freely that we cannot get outside our concepts to see if they are true, in fact if my picture of the interrelation of subject, concepts and world is true getting outside would not help. What is required is to be able to claim that we make the truth/judgment distinction from inside our conceptualisation, and that all we need to consider is under what conditions we make the distinction. To do this I utilise Wiggins' marks of truth, which are indications of the conditions under which we predicate truth of beliefs.[9] To see how this might work I consider how the twin notions of truth and rationality work in thinking about the material world.

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[9]David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*, Aristotelian Society Series, Vol. 6, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), particularly Essay IV, Truth as Predicated of Moral Judgment.

The second problem is that this approach will only work if we allow that the ways of thinking about things that we are considering are subject to the truth/judgment distinction, that is that they are concerned with and subject to the constraints of truth. The area I am specially concerned with in my thesis has notoriously been thought not to be the sort of discourse or thought that is concerned with truth. People have thought that because there is so much disagreement in moral judgments, that either they are not judgments at all, but expressions of sentiment or attitudes[10], or that truth in such cases is relative to the particular moral system or environment within which the judgments are made[11]. In chapter 2, therefore, I discuss whether it is possible to hold a position with respect to moral thought that allows for true and false moral judgments. I argue the case for what I call a sophisticated moral realist, against the positions of moral realist and moral constructivist. My claim is that moral realism as traditionally understood makes too strong requirements on moral judgments, because both it and moral constructivism derive from the first world picture discussed in chapter one. If facts about the world can be beyond our grasping then their truth is beyond our ability to assign it to judgments about those facts. The moral constructivists response to this is to claim that moral truths are not about the world but about human beliefs, but this I argue, disqualifies them as truths, since at some level they are not subject to the truth/judgment distinction. The sophisticated moral realist, however, holds that truth is within our grasp, and that moral judgments can be candidates for truth, which is recognised by Wiggins' marks of truth.

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[10]Hume, of course, is the founding father of such views in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by L A Selb-Bigge, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Claendon, 1990), but is followed by emotivists such asC L Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (London: Yale University Press, 1944) and prescriptivists such as R M Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952).

[11]For example Edward Westermark, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1906) and Melville J Herskovits, *Man and His Works: the science of cultural anthropology* (New Yord: Knopf, 1948)

The third chapter addresses the third problem about truth, which is whether truth is relative to a discourse or a particular way of thinking. I approach this through a discussion of Crispin Wright's claim that all assertoric discourse have a truth predicate, specific to the discourse, which arises out of, but differs in extension from, the norms of warranted assertibility of that discourse.[12] This makes truth relative to particular discourses and claims that there is no need for any realist, or presumably sophisticated realist, picture to maintain the applicability of truth to judgments. I argue that the substantial truth Wright claims to find in the norms of assertoric warrant does not arise out of them but is assumed by Wright. If there really is this sort of substantial truth as a norm of the discourse, then it is not generated by the discourse but by the discourse's subject matter, and in this sense is external to the discourse. In this sort of discourse, which I call a Non-Minimal discourse, the norms of warranted assertibility arise out of truth, and there is no reason to assume that this is a separate type of truth for each discourse. The only sense in which truth would be relative to a discourse is that the discourse may only be concerned with some aspects of our relation to our environment, so it may be concerned with a particular set of truths. This does not, however, require that truth as such is relative to the discourse, only that the discourse may be concerned with some truths, not all the truths there are.

Having established that the truth/judgment distinction is one that can be applied in moral discourse and thought, and that if so applied it will reflect how the things that those ways of thinking and talking are about, I then go on in chapter 4 to consider what application of the distinction will require. Wiggins' central point is that use of the concept true requires us to be sensitive to various aspects of our environment, an environment that is common to thinkers of this sort. I consider that in making moral judgments and decisions in general, one of the things it is important to get right is the situation within which the decision is made and the relationships between those in that

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[12]Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994)

situation. I also consider in this chapter how we identify the actions we consider in moral judgments and decisions. I use as a model for the application of my methodology the work of Gareth Evans.[13] He uses the truth/judgment distinction in discussion of thought about material objects to investigate what abilities we need to develop to think about such things. I use his ideas of the Fundamental Ground of Difference and the Generality Constraint to show that making judgments about actions requires us to identify the agents and others as part of a network of relationships involving commitments, responsibilities and expectations.

In chapter 5 I develop this approach and consider in detail the nature of the relationships involved and the abilities we require to identify those relationships objectively. Again I compare the situation with that described by Evans with respect to the material world. I argue that we need both an egocentric and an objective understanding of the relationships we are involved in. The nature of these relationships, their commitments, responsibilities and expectations, if it is to be correctly judged and understood by us, requires us to be the sort of things that actually engage in such relationships and to feel the pull of those commitments, responsibilities and expectations. During the course of this chapter I consider the problems caused for my approach by those who do not feel the pull of such relationships (the amoralist), and those for whom the pull is not strong enough to motivate action (weakness of will). I also consider what role, if any, desires have in such judgments and decisions. I conclude with a discussion of whether consideration of these relationships and their role in personal decision-making is sufficient for what has traditionally been considered to be morality, and conclude that, while it does not fit what have often been considered to be the requirements of moral behaviour, it does not generate universal principles or laws, it nevertheless fits the purpose of moral behaviour and moral systems.

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[13]Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. by John McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991)

Although I may not have discussed very much the particular concepts we have of persons or moral agents, I hope that what emerges from my thesis is a picture of people in moral terms that fits with the position I was discussing above, but with a somewhat firmer basis for that position. The self or person is not identified purely by a bodily criterion, although that plays its part, nor by a mental criterion, although that develops out of its history. The picture we have is of a self which is not capable of being considered as an isolated individual, but as embedded in a variety of contexts, which are an inescapable part of it. What makes someone the person they are is the personal relationships they are part of, the commitments and responsibilities they take on, and the ways they develop and respond to them.

Chapter 1: The Context Principle

In this chapter my aim is to show how analysing the concepts we use could help us understand ourselves, others, both people and things and the relations between us. This is a stronger view than the one that says our concepts can reveal what we take ourselves to be. What I am hoping to do is to discover, from the sort of concepts we use and the way that we use them, how we are actually related to the sorts of things we conceptualise and what both we and they are like. My point is that the concepts we use could only be used by particular types of things about particular types of things. To take a simple example, to conceptualise things as having a particular shape we need to be the sorts of things that perceive shapes in one way or another, and they need to be the sorts of things that have a shape. If we were incapable of perceiving the shape of things, or if there was no shape that things were, it is hard to see how we would develop or use shape concepts. We would not know how or when to use shape concepts, what sorts of things might have shapes and what might not, whether we were right or wrong to think of something as having this or that shape. So our capacities for thinking in terms of shapes is not separable from an account of what it is for things to have shapes and our sensitivity to them.

This, of course, is much too fast. There may be ways of conceptualising things that don't reflect or respond to the way things are. For example, the whole area of magic and witchcraft is a way of conceptualising things which, with the exception of fiction, we would reject as mistaken. So there will have to be ways of sorting out to which sorts of conceptualisation this methodology can be applied. Before that, however, I want to consider in more detail what analysis of our use of concepts might be supposed to give us information about. Then I want to think about how we could proceed with this analysis, and finally investigate the implications this methodology has for some other notions such as our understanding of truth and rationality.

1.1 The Nature of Conception

There are those who would say that I have set myself an impossible task; that this seems to be an attempt to use concepts to get to something beyond those concepts. If there were something beyond our concepts, this would be something we could never have access to, and could never say or know anything about. The best we could be able to do on this account is to say that we think our concepts mirror, or reflect, or correspond to some external reality, but we can never know what it is like, or how well our concepts represent it to us, because we can never get outside our conceptual system to check. Even if we could somehow access reality in some other way, this would just be via some other way of conceptualising, and would therefore be open to the same objections: we would not have accessed reality as it really is, but only some conception of it which may be more or less accurate. How could we ever hope to get outside any conceptual system to understand reality `as it is in itself' if this means as it is independently of any way of conceptualising it.

The problem that is raised here, and perhaps also alluded to in the first paragraph, arises out of a distinction between reality and ourselves as they are in themselves independent of any conception of them, and those same things as we take them to be, that is as our conceptualisations present them to us. It seems that I am trying to gain knowledge of the self, and reality, independent of the concepts used by that self; as if knowledge of something as it really is must be knowledge of it independent not only of my conceptualisation of it, or of human conceptualisation of it, but of any conceptualisation of it. The idea is that if reality is conceptualised differently by different subjects, then how it really is must be independent of any and all conceptualisations of it.

I think this is a mistake, and that the mistake becomes apparent when we consider what it would mean for reality to `be some way' independent of any conceptualisation

of it. I think this idea of reality as being some particular way in itself independent of any conception of it is something that arises when we take some ideas further than they can reasonably be taken. We start, for example, with the idea that I can be wrong in my thinking about something, perhaps compared to everyone else's thinking about it. In this sense I would be wrong if I said that Britain is a republic. Now this idea of being wrong makes sense, if you like, because there is something to compare it to, that is the correctness of the fact that as everyone else knows, Britain is a constitutional monarchy. We have to be careful here not confuse the point I am making with an epistemological point. It is not that, in order to assess my mistake as a mistake I need to look at what the majority opinion is and measure my assertions against that. That would give a concept of mistake that would not allow the majority to be wrong at all, and thus the claim that concepts might fail to match up to reality at all would fall at the first fence. The point is that for there to be possibility of being mistaken about the constitution of Britain there must be the possibility of being right about it. If I am making the sort of claim which can be mistaken, it must be possible for it to be the sort of claim which could succeed. So the important point about the idea of comparison is not that we compare to everyone else's thinking, but that we compare to correct thinking.

This allows us to go a step further and consider the idea of everyone being wrong about something, perhaps compared to their correct understanding of other things. Here we might say that everyone was wrong when they thought that the world was flat, and they were wrong because the concept of the world as an approximately oblate spheroid fits in better with our understanding of physical theory, our experience of travelling around the world, and pictures of the world we have from space. Even if everyone thought that the world was flat, they would not be correct to do so. The shape of the world did not change between the times when everyone, or most people, thought it was flat, and nowadays when most people think it is not. If, however, we try to take the further step and say that everyone could be wrong about everything, we

run head on into the question of what it is to be wrong here. We seem to have no standard of correctness to compare our assertions to. We are not wrong compared to our current understanding of reality, because it is that current understanding of reality that is said to be wrong. Here it seems that what we are comparing this to, whether we realise it or not, is some other, better understanding of reality, either by us at a later stage, or by some other subject.

Yet how would we be able to compare our conceptualisation of reality to some other conceptualisation of it? This only seems possible if we can understand, that is conceptualise, both points of view. We need in fact to have acquired other standards of correctness, another, different concept of correctness, before we can apply the concept of being mistaken to our entire conception of things. We cannot compare two conceptualisations and say one is better than another unless we have some background understanding against which to compare them, as we have in the two earlier cases. Further, this is not just saying that we cannot do the work of comparison, but that the very idea of comparing, of being right or wrong, makes no sense unless there is also some idea of there being some such background, and some criteria against which to make the comparison. But if we have the understanding, the background and criteria to compare the two conceptualisations, then it is not the case that we are wrong about everything, only that part of what we now understand is wrong compared to the rest.

It is very tempting to think of the possibility of everyone being wrong about everything as just an extension of the possibility of everyone being wrong about something, and someone being wrong about everything. In both those cases, however, there is some comparison that makes sense of the notion of being wrong. In the first case the mistake is surely assessed against the correct usage of our other concepts (the world is not flat because of how flat applies to tables and plains). In the second case the idea seems to be that this person is mistaken in his use of all his concepts. Actually I am not sure that we can make sense properly of this last notion, since it

seems we would have to have some point of contact with someone, some shared conceptions, to even consider that he had a conception of reality worth criticising. However, the case of everyone being wrong about everything has nothing to be compared with that could allow its being classified as wrong: there is no sense in, nor possible understanding of the notion of wrongness here because there is no sense in, nor possible understanding of correctness either.[1]

There seems sometimes to be one further step it is possible to make in this extension of ideas, that is the idea that something could be other than *any* conception of it. We understand something being some way independent of an individual's or a group's conception of it by saying it is correctly conceptualised in some other way. Thus a conceptual system has some criteria for the use of a particular concept. We can also understand the criteria for the concept being wrong if the concept which uses those criteria doesn't fit with our experience accurately enough. It is under these conditions that we modify the criteria of a concept, that we change the definition of it, because we think the thing conceptualised is some way other than the way we have conceived of it. But what would it be for something to be `some way' other than the way any subject conceived of it? Here we seem to be trying to conceptualise unconceptualised existence, to understand how something could be *some* way which is not *any* particular way of understanding it.

The question here is not just whether we can describe or talk about something independently of some way of conceptualising it (which of course we cannot), but whether the very notion of something being as it is independent of any conceptualisation makes sense. This seems to insist that what we are trying to gain access to is unconceptualised by any system, and therefore unconceptualisable. If the essence of reality is not captured by *any conceptualisation at all*, (not just our

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[1]For a similar point about the absolute conception see David McNaughton, *Moral Vision*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p.84.

conception, or all current conceptions, but any possible conception) then it must surely be such as not to be *capable* of being captured by any conceptualisation. It seems to suggest that *what* it is has nothing to do with whether it is conceptualised or not. I think we have to be careful here with respect to that phrase `what it is'. It is easy to think of that as being the same as `that it is'. While it makes sense to say that whether something exists should have nothing to do with whether it is conceptualised, or conceptualisable, that is a quite different thing from saying that what it is may be unconceptualised or unconceptualisable. The question is not whether whatever reality is could exist without our conceptualising it, after all it might have been the case that nothing capable of conceptualisation ever existed, but whether it could `be some way' that was independent of any conceptualisation of it, whether it makes any sense at all to attempt to think of something, let alone everything, as being unconceptualisable, whether we understand how everything could be unconceptualisable, and therefore unconceptualised in this radical sense. That seems to require a revision in our concept of `conceptualisation'. I suggest that we can by definition have no concept of what it would be for reality to be somehow different from any conceptualisation of it at all Thus, as in the less radical case above, it turns out that we cannot really make sense of the idea that reality might be somehow other than any conception of it. We have no background, in fact we are postulating the impossibility of any background, against which such a judgement could make sense, and therefore the impossibility of such a distinction being used.

We have arrived then at the position that, although it seems as if we can understand the notion of all of reality being other than either our conceptual systems, or any conceptual systems present or could present it as, this notion is not in fact anything we would be able to claim, it is not something we could be right or wrong about. We can at best claim that part of a conceptual system could be mistaken, since the concept of being mistaken relies on a complementary concept of correctness. If there is, by definition, no standard of correctness with which conceptual systems could be

compared to assess their rightness or wrongness, then there can be no sense to the notion of being right or wrong. Note that this is not an argument to show that we could not understand something that we could not conceptualise, but that we cannot make use of the idea that everything covered by our conceptual systems, or all conceptual systems, might be wholly other than those systems show them to be. Such an idea has no content.[2]

If this is the case, then the objection raised at the start of this section has failed; it cannot be the case that the attempt to discover what reality and the self might be like by looking at our concepts is doomed from the start on the grounds that both these items might be totally other than the way our concepts present them, since they cannot be totally other than the way our concepts present them. Even if we allow the bare possibility that reality can be conceptualised totally differently by different subjects, that is that different subjects could have a conception of reality so different from one another that they had no common ground and so could not even recognise the other's conception as a conception of reality, this does not have to lead to its really being totally other than all those conceptions, but only to its really being able to sustain these different conceptions, that is to its really being capable of being conceptualised in these different ways. If beings had developed which only conceptualised the world in terms of sound concepts, and others had developed which only conceptualised it in terms of visual concepts, this does not seem to require the claim that the world is

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[2]The idea here is similar to the point made by Christopher Peacocke in his 'The Limits of Intelligibility: A Post-Verificationist Proposal' in *Philosophical Review*, 97 (1988) 463-96. His use of what he calls the switching tactic shows that the content of a thought cannot be divorced from the thinkers sensitivity to their environment. This would show how it would be impossible to give an individuating account of the content of the thought that our entire conceptual system is mistaken, as opposed to a thought that part of it is. So when I claim that this idea has no content, I want to suggest that this is an idea we could make no sense of. A similar point is made by John Mc Dowell in 'Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following' in *Wittgenstein: to Follow a Rule*, ed. by Steven H. Holtzman and Christopher M. Leich (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) p. 150, where he says "We cannot occupy the independent perspective that platonism envisages; and it is only because we confusedly think we can that we think we can make any sense of it." This idea of content is discussed in greater detail with reference to Wiggins' marks of truth in chapter 2.

wrongly conceptualised either way, but that it can be conceptualised both ways. Both conceptualisations may be incomplete, but to have an incomplete understanding of something is not necessarily to be totally wrong about it. Thus there is no content to the idea that reality and our selves might be totally other than the way our concepts present them, and therefore looking at our concepts should be able to give us some guide as to some of the characteristics of ourselves and the world we inhabit.

1.2 Subject, Concept and World

It might still be argued that although I have shown that what our conceptual systems are about cannot be wholly other than the way those conceptual systems present them, this would still be no use in revealing what our selves are like, but only what reality, or the world is like. The obvious answer to this is that we also conceptualise about ourselves, and that the same constraints on conceptualisation about ourselves apply as is the case with conceptualisation about reality in general. We are a part of that reality. The objection, however, seems to be based on a picture of the relation between subject, conception and object which we have already rejected. To help us see the problem I would like to consider two pictures of the way we think about ourselves as subjects conceptualising a world.

The first is of a world which is the way it is, entirely independent of us or any other observers, which we view, as it were, through the spectacles of our concepts. These spectacles colour our perception of the objective world, and they are spectacles which we cannot remove, so we can never see the world as it is independently of us and our concepts. In this picture concepts represent or model the world for us, and we play the role of detached observers. This is the picture we have rejected by the arguments above. The world is not, and cannot be something totally other than our conceptions of it, and therefore cannot be at a distance from us in the way this picture seems to suggest.

The other possible picture is of much more inter-relation between the three elements. It would not, in this picture, be the case that an individual, or even humankind in general, would be independent observers of a world that is the way it is despite them. Some of the world is, after all, the way it is because of us, and we are to some extent the way we are because of the world. It would be a picture of an interaction between world and observer via the medium of concepts, but neither the world nor the observer would be capable of being understood independently of the other or of concepts.[3] To try and conceptualise the subject, and here I mean the individual subject, in total independence of the way we conceptualise the world, or *vice versa*, would be to claim that we have two entirely different sets of concepts, and would leave us with a question as to how we succeed in conceptualising ourselves, what standards of correctness we could possibly have for concepts about ourselves. This is not to say that the world is something we construct, in the sense of create from nothing, out of concepts, since that would see us as independently existing and the world as dependent on us and the same problem about conceptualisation would arise. Rather this picture shows both the world and ourselves as real objects, but not entirely separable, since *we* are not something independent of the world even though we tend to view it as something independent of us, and as something that could be conceived of in ways different from ours, and it is not wholly independent of us since we are a part of it. The way we perceive both ourselves, the world and the interaction between us is through the medium of conceptualisation, but the conceptualisation itself is part of that interaction. It is not that there is a observer and something to be observed and concepts setting up a model of the observed. Observer, observed and model (subject,

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[3]A similar picture of the relations between subject and world appears in Jonathan Dancy's *Moral Reasons*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), Ch. 2, p.32-34, where he rejects a Cartesian picture. His approach starts from a different point but we converge on a cognitive externalist picture of reasons for action being facts about us and our environment.

the world and concepts) are all inter-related. Concepts are not added onto our interaction with and involvement in the world, they are part of that interaction.[4]

Since, however, subject and world are not separated from one another, and part of the interaction between them is in terms of language and concepts, then the concepts used by the subject say something, however inaccurately about both the world and the subject. World, subject and concepts are not separate from one another, and looking at any one should therefore give us information about the others. Yet even this idea somehow distorts the image; it seems to suggest that we can look at language in abstraction from ourselves and the world and find out something about both of them. What we have to consider ourselves as doing is looking at the interaction of subject, world and language, not from outside this interaction, but from within it. This analysis would not be done independently of subject, world or language, or tell us anything about any of these three elements independently of the others, but it seems to me that it should be possible to reflect on the interaction as a whole through the forms it usually takes, and discover something about the way it relates the elements of itself to one another.

There is need for caution here, however, since our new picture of the interrelation of subject, language and reality might lead us to think that we have lost any notion of objectivity here. At least with the old picture the world was separate from us and anything we discovered about it would be an objective discovery. Have we, in our new picture, sacrificed this objectivity and exchanged it for a wholly subjective world; does our interactive picture show us each subject alone with their own world and

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[4]This point bears some similarity to John Campbell's discussion of causal indexicality and working concepts in *Past,Space and Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), section 2.2. Here Campbell shows that our interaction with the world requires the use of concepts that are related to our causal powers (causal indexicals) and concepts with causal significance (working concepts). Both of these types of concept are grasped not as a theoretical understanding of the causal properties of ourselves and others, they are not separable from our involvment with the world, but as a practical understanding in the course of our interaction with the world.

language? Our first world picture was criticised because it seemed to have no resources for saying that conceptualisation of the world could be wholly other than the way the world really was, although this was what it maintained. On the other hand, could our second picture be criticised for not allowing any understanding at all of how a subject might be wrong about the world. If subject, language and world are all interlinked, then won't subject and world always fit with language? If so, there seems to be no way we could say a subject might be wrong about the world; there might be no room for the concept of being mistaken.

This is to go further, however, than our argument warrants. The rejection of the idea that reality may be so far from us that our conceptualisation could not grasp it does not entail moving it so close that our conceptualisation is hardly separable at all. We may have rejected a totally mind-independent reality, but this does not warrant accepting a totally mind-dependent reality[5]. In order to be able to retain the idea of being mistaken about things, we need a picture of a reality or world which contains us as subjects, and our conceptions of it which are one of our interactions with, or responses to it. Thus the world is not our creation, and therefore mind-dependent; what we find in the world is a result of the interaction between us, the world and our language.

It is also worth bearing in mind that conceptualisation is not the whole of our interaction with the world. Perhaps in a sense it lags behind the rest of our interaction. We live in the world, and part of that living in the world is conceptualising it, but we also use concepts to stand back from our interaction with the world and describe it. In this sense concepts may be said to lag behind experience of and living in the world. We may develop ways of living, modify our interaction with the world, and thus need

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[5]Again as Campbell points out, see note 4, the objective world of objects and subjects with causal powers is essential to our understanding of ourselves and the world, and our practical interaction with it. It is, however, an objective world, despite our involvement with it. For more about the concept of mind-dependence or -independence as it applies to our concepts, see the discussion of Michael Luntley's distinctions in this respect in Chapter 2.

to develop new concepts to allow new ways of thinking about it. Concepts may not always adequately fit how we meet with and live in the world; we can discover new facets of that interaction, and even as we do so our interaction changes and moves on. So concepts are part of our interaction yet they can also stand back and comment on that interaction. Yet there is no access to the world independently of conceptualisation, independently of our or any other interaction with it. There may be other possible interactions with the world which would view it differently, and in this sense the world is independent of us. But these views of the world would not be any more objective or absolute than our view is. If we could come to understand them it would only be via a more complex interaction, a new way of living, involving the world, ourselves, others and some common concepts. There would be no conception of the world without interaction with it, and therefore no absolute conception of the world `as it is in itself', unconceptualised by anyone or anything. Even a God's-eye view of the world would be a conception of some sort. Yet to say that there is no non-conceptual encounter with the world is not to say that there is nothing to be encountered. Our encounter is with the world, not a figment of our imagination. These conceptions we have of the world may change, but they will do so in response to our experience of the world and not *vice versa*. What we are conceptualising is the world, because it is more than just ours as we conceive of it now, it can sustain our conceptions of it, but there seems no reason to assume our present one is the only conception it can sustain, and therefore our conception of it can and does change.

So we have reached a position that what we conceptualise is not totally different from our conceptualisation of it. It is something capable of being grasped by our conceptual systems, and is in fact grasped by them and presented to us in a more or less accurate fashion. We can assess the accuracy of any claim, by an individual or a community, in terms of the standards of correctness that our interaction with the world gives us. We have concepts which we may modify in the light of our already

conceptualised experience, and these concepts are about a reality which is capable of sustaining a variety of conceptions of it.

1.3 The Discovery Process

So how do we go about our task of discovering something about ourselves and our interaction with the world we live in via the medium of the concepts we use. I said above that I wanted to look at the forms our conceptual interaction with the world usually take, to discover something about the nature of that interaction, about the way it relates the elements of itself to one another. What possibility will we have of discovering what we really are, and what is the force of `really' here? It must be in terms of our interaction with the world and concepts, but still objective in that it is a discovery by that interaction, it is something that we do not personally create and cannot avoid. But what does `our' mean here? Should we be looking at the individual's interaction with the world, at the community's interaction, or at humanity's interaction? If what we find in the world is to be real it must be somehow independent of the individual's private view of the world. The criteria for what is to count as real cannot surely be just what the individual thinks about the world. Even if there were only one individual who could conceptualise, on our picture of the interaction between subject world and concepts, the constraints on his concepts come not just from the individual but from the world as well. If the individual is part of a larger community that conceptualises the world in the same way, then this community and their concepts will be part of the world as well, and so part of what constrains the concepts used. We do not have here a picture of an individual subject, living in his own private world and interacting with it in terms of his own private concepts. The world he lives in and is part of is larger than him. When he thinks about it, the ways he thinks about it will be constrained by how it is as well as by how he is. In this sense both the world and his concepts are public, and so his experience is also public: world, concepts and experience are all the sorts of things that are available to anything

that has his type of interaction with the world, whether or not there is anything else that has that type of interaction. The individual not only uses public concepts to think about and to communicate to others the truth about the world as he finds it, but the way that he finds it must be understood by him in terms of the concepts he is given or develops. This is another sense in which his concepts are public. If he is part of a community who share the same subject/concept/world interaction, then his concepts will be acquired from his community via communication. `We' or `our' then refers to those who share the same sort of subject/concept/world interaction and so conceptualise the world in the same way The subject's concepts aim at revealing truth *about* the world both to him and to anyone who *share* his type of interaction with the world, but also at helping the individual to understand, formulate and organise his experience in the world. So the subject's interaction with the world both *regulates* his use of concepts, and is *mediated through* them.

We must also bear in mind that regulation here is not by intersubjective agreement, it is regulation with respect to truth, a regulation which will distinguish between the truth of a situation and the judgements we make about it. That is, the individual, the group, community, or even all of humanity must be able to discover that they have been mistaken about things. We can agree as much as we like that the world is flat, that will not make it so. If we are both individually and *en masse*, subjects living in and interacting with a world, then even *en masse* the world is part of what constrains our conceptualisation of it. The very fact that we do change our ways of thinking about our environment and ourselves, and that those changes are in response to something, not merely random, show that the truth of how things are is not constituted by what we think about it, but can and does force changes on our ways of thinking. We are not just thinking or talking amongst ourselves about some figment of our imagination, we are involved in interacting with a common world in and through the medium of common concepts, and the way that world is limits what we can truly think about it and the ways we can actually interact with it.

This picture both of concepts being regulated by our experience and formulating our responses to that experience raises two questions. What notion of truth is being used here and how does truth regulate my and others conception of the world and allow a truth/judgement distinction? I will come back to the first question later on, but it seems that the answer to the second question will decide how independent or universal are the things that are discovered via this subject/concept/world interaction. Will what is discovered about us and our interaction be the same for everyone, or only relevant to particular groups? Is there an interaction common to humanity, to different societies, to a particular gender, a religious or an ethical community? How broadly do we take a type of interaction? If it is a way of thinking about and interacting with the world, how do we discover how people think? The obvious answer is that we do this by looking at how they behave and listening to what they say. Then, however, the problem of how to analyse different languages arises. Are any discoveries made on the basis of use of a common natural language or a sub-language or jargon? If we answer this question differently with respect to different fields of enquiry and different discourses, we may in the end discover things that will only exist for some groups and not others. It seems possible that only if people `speak the same language' will they find the same things in the world. So is it possible to find a language that we all speak in all circumstances, or can we find a way of looking at our different languages that will analyse them in the same way and thus provide a common ground for their assessment? The move has been made here from concepts to language on the basis that it is in language that I am discussing all this, and it is my and other people's language that gives me access to how they and I think about the world. Nonetheless it must not be forgotten that new ways of thinking cause us to modify our language, to invent new terminology and restrict or broaden old terminology. So the language we develop reflects and frames the concepts we use.

Talk about languages, sub-languages and jargons, and the notorious difficulties of translation make it apparent that we do not, in some sense all speak the same language in all circumstances. Yet if there are sub-languages, languages suitable to different areas of our lives, different ways of interacting with the world and one another, they seem, nonetheless, to be developments out of a common everyday sort of language that we all share. It may be that in certain areas of life people find it necessary to be precise about technical terminology, about the special elements of that sort of interaction, and thus find the need to develop, expand or restrict the application of terms, or even to develop new terms. All this is done, however, against a background use of language and concepts that we do seem to have in common. I want to argue that there are some ways of interacting with the world that are common to all of us, even if we speak a different natural language. We have some ways of interacting with the world, in terms of how we move around and negotiate the more obvious features of everyday life, which anyone that we are capable of recognising as interacting with and conceptualising the world will also have to have. That is not to say that there may not be ways of interacting with reality that we would not recognise, but this seems to be a bare possibility that cannot make any difference to us and our interaction with reality. Anyone, however, whom we can and do recognise as sharing our sort of everyday interaction with the world, has a common basis with us for exploring the possible differences of conception that we find useful or necessary. If we can start at this everyday discourse we may be able to move on from it into other more specialised discourses and see how they develop out of the everyday discourse; where they develop or depart from it.

How are we to set about analysing this everyday discourse, our interaction with the grosser features of everyday life. If we look at language from a purely grammatical point of view then different natural languages may have different grammatical structures which would appear to show each language as relating to reality in different ways, as recognising different sorts of objects and relations. If, however, we attempt

to eliminate these differences by using some sort of logical analysis, how are we to go about it?

1.4 The Context Principle

The way I want to consider is to use a principle which Frege introduces as the second of three methodological principles in the Introduction to the Grundlagen[6]. These are:-

> 1) Always to separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective.
> 2) Never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition.
> 3) Always to bear in mind the distinction between object and concept.

These principles seem to set up three possibilities in sorting out the interrelation between subject, language and reality.

The first sets up a distinction between entities that depend on our minds, and those that are mind independent, the former discoverable by psychological analysis and the latter by logical analysis. It introduces the familiar notion that what really exists is independent of what we think about the world or what we seem to discover in it. We have to be careful here, though, as to what is meant by `we' here. Is the distinction being made between what an individual perceives as opposed to the rest of humanity, or his community, or between what human beings are inclined to see in the world and what is really there? The use of psychological and logical as separate areas of study suggests that what is psychological is not going to be applied solely to the individual subject, but to human ways of thinking.

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[6]Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. J L Austin, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. x.

The second principle, the Context Principle, suggests that, although we want to find out what words mean, and how language relates to the world, this is not possible if we consider the words on their own, it can only be done if the words are understood in the context of a proposition. Here again caution is required. Is the meaning of a word to be found in the context of one proposition in which it occurs, or in any proposition in which it occurs, or in the context of all actual or possible propositions it might occur in? Here the single proposition cannot be enough, for the word may be used in a non-standard way, and if it is we will surely only discover this by measuring its usage in this sentence against the meanings of the other words in the proposition. If they all had their meaning given by their role in individual propositions, it is hard to see how we might grasp their meaning at all. This suggests that, at the very least, the meaning of a word must be found in the role it plays in a variety of propositions. In some sense the role a word can play in some new proposition is constrained by the role it has played in past propositions. Neither Humpty Dumpty nor we can make words mean anything we like. Whether this should be taken as far as constraining or being constrained by all possible propositions looks dubious. Word use develops, words often get used in ways which might at one time have been thought incompatible with their meaning; current uses of `wicked' or `cool' spring to mind. Here some of the past patterns of usage cease to constrain current usage, and new patterns develop. It is those new patterns that now give us the meaning of these terms, or sometimes both patterns are current and so meaning will depend on patterns of use in context. People may deplore the change of meaning of a word like `gay' from happy to homosexual, but they cannot deny that its current meaning is found in its patterns of use. So quite how widely the field of propositions which constrain a word's use and give its meaning might be is open to debate, but it is surely wider than the individual proposition.

The third principle seems to be talking about a definable distinction between objects and concepts. In Frege's work an object is a complete entity as opposed to a concept, which is incomplete. That is, objects and concepts are what are referred to in language by names, or singular terms, and predicates respectively. Now a name can seem to stand on its own, it has nothing that needs to be added to it. A predicate, however, needs to be applied to something, it has a vacancy to be filled. Thus `... is red' needs completing by some singular term such as `this pen'. It is worth noting that this is not the way I have been using `concept'. I am not restricting its use to predicates, but include singular terms and relations within its scope. In the way of thinking about language and thought used in this thesis, objects, as well as properties and relations, are the content of concepts, they are what concepts are about.

These three principles combine the idea that what we find in the world is what exists independently of our perceiving it with the idea that whatever we find is discoverable only through looking at the role that terms referring to these things play in propositions, and therefore their role in language. The context principle, the second principle above, says that only by looking at the role words play in propositions can we find out their meanings, that is in Fregean terms, what they refer to. Only by looking at the relations of words to one another in propositions, can we see what sorts of objects and relations are recognised by our interaction with the world, what we think about and how we think about it. So the Fregean view is that this sort of logical analysis is possible; that all language is capable of logical analysis which will reveal through its structure how that language relates to reality.

What do we mean by logical analysis here, however? If what is meant is reduction to some symbolism, to some other language in effect, there seem to be a number of difficulties. Classical logic seems too limited to translate, or represent, many of the things we want to say in everyday language, and although different types of logic have been developed in an attempt to expand the areas of natural language to which it

might be applicable, we do not yet seem to have an analysis in terms of symbolic logic which can cope with everyday language completely. Further, any reduction to symbolism regards as irrelevant the nuances of everyday language that contribute to its richness and its ability to express and reflect our experience in a variety of ways. Even if we could do the logical analysis, could we do it without antecedently assuming a specific relationship between subject, language and world that makes the analysis come out the way we want it to? It may seem that the obvious way to decide on what is a correct logical analysis of some language is to decide what are real objects and then only allow these to appear as the referents of singular terms in the logical analysis of that language, and similarly with predicates and relations. This, of course, will not do for our project of discovering what the real nature of our interaction with the world is. What we need is a way of ensuring a correct logical analysis independent of knowing what this is. So what will or could provide a criterion of correctness for our logical analysis? If symbolic logical analysis will not do, if we cannot reduce our everyday language to a symbolic language and read off the structure of the world and our place in it from the structure of this symbolic language and the role terms referring to us play in it, what sort of analysis can we carry out?

1.5 The Role of Truth

Perhaps we can have recourse here to the constraints on language I mentioned earlier. In his paper "The Thought"[7], Frege says that the task of logic is "to discern the laws of truth.", "logic has the same relation to truth as physics has to weight or heat." That is, truth is what logic is about. So a logical analysis will be an analysis with respect to truth. It does not have to be a reduction to symbols but it must preserve the distinction we make between what we judge to be the case and what truly is the case; it must preserve the truth/judgement distinction. Rather than reducing languages to symbolic

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[7]Gottlob Frege, `The Thought', in Scott and Soames, eds., *Propositions and Attitudes*, (Oxford: O.U.P., 1988)

logic our logical analysis could look at the patterns inherent in our use of language, which reflect the patterns inherent in our thinking; patterns that have reference to and are regulated by notions of truth and rationality. If, whatever the language we are talking, whatever group or community we are talking with, we are aiming to communicate truths about our experience of and interactions with the world, then there are going to be patterns discernible in our use of language that are related to truth. Our use of terms in our language will commit us to certain types of behaviour, including linguistic behaviour. Our possibilities of understanding one another to be making communications aimed at truth, or to be thinking about a common situation will also acknowledge certain notions of rational behaviour. This seems most readily apparent in our everyday interaction with the world, our talk about material objects and the ways we relate to them, and I think it is this sort of talk that forms the basis for our concepts of truth and rationality.

If we say "That is a chair over there", then we are committed to all sorts of other behaviour if we are to be seen as rational and attempting to tell the truth. This includes anything from offering it to someone who needs a seat, to walking round it when we head in that direction, to expecting it to be there if we turn away and then look back at it. Similarly the way we explain other's or our own behaviour depends on how we think about things. If I draw up a chair for someone who comes into the room, then the explanation of my behaviour is that I thought they wanted to sit down, and I thought the chair was there for sitting on, even if I in fact say nothing. So what I am calling logical analysis is some analysis which looks at the things we say and do and asks what else our behaviour, including linguistic behaviour commits us to if we are aiming at truth in our communications and assuming rational behaviour in others.

If we make a distinction between the truth of a situation and a subject's judgement about it, what further judgements or behaviour are we committed to?[8]

In doing this we must assume that truth is not just relative to some language or jargon, but is at least common to the subject/concept/world interaction: that we know what truth is, even if we cannot define it, and that it is something that does not change with changes in our type of discourse. When I say that it is common to a subject/concept/world interaction, this must not be taken as suggesting that if our interaction with the world, our ways of thinking about it, have changed then the truth has changed as well. The point is that truth regulates our thinking in terms of the interaction we have with the world, but development of a new way of interacting does not require that the world has changed, so much as our way of understanding it has changed. If that is what has happened then the same truth will regulate this newly developed understanding. If truth were constituted by some discourse or way of thinking, if the truth of a situation were to be what the appropriate discourse or way of thinking says it is then we would have no hold on the idea that the discourse or way of thinking may itself have got things wrong.[9] We must also assume that all the languages or jargons this logical analysis is attempting to analyse are in fact subject to the truth/judgement distinction. Thus, if we assume, as has been done in the past, that aesthetic or moral judgements, for example, are not candidates for truth, or are only so for a limited time or place, then the objects we might find by a logical analysis of these languages will not be objects for everyone, but only for some specific group of people at some specific period of time. I would like to postpone discussion of this latter point for the moment[10] and concentrate on the case of discourse about material

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[8]This idea is similar to the idea of canonical commitments that C Peacocke deals in more detail in his *Thoughts: An Essay on Content*, Aristotelian Society Series, Vol. 4. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

[9]For more about this question see the discussion of truth and objectivity in chapter 3.

[10]See the discussion of sophisticated moral realism in chapter 2

objects, since this will perhaps help us clarify our notions of truth and rationality, and the role they play in this analysis.

It certainly seems to be the case that our view of truth will affect what objects we eventually discover in this process of analysis. A coherence view of truth, for example, may not produce objects other than linguistic objects, since truth may have reference only to the connection between our beliefs and not to the world at all. Whereas a correspondence theory would seem to require an ability to assess how things are in the world, independent of language. David Wiggins[11] has produced, if not a theory of truth, at least some marks of truth which link truth to the possibility of translation and understanding communication via an assumption of rationality. The idea is that the possibility of our understanding one another, in terms both of language and behaviour, depends on attributing true beliefs to others about an environment which we and they have in common. In discussing this he has produced five marks of truth which are minimal constraints on what count as true beliefs, that is his marks are marks of what we have to hold of the concept `true' to use it for understanding others and our own language and behaviour. I think it possible that these are the sorts of constraints that would have to apply to an individual's thoughts about his situation, even if he were the only conceptualiser around, but as we are clearly not in that situation I shall not pursue this further.

If this is the view of truth we are working with, and it is one which I think captures some of the essential elements of our understanding of truth, then to come up with objects recognised as such by others, we need to acknowledge a common rationality and a common type of subject/language/world interaction which allows us to link truth and language via logic. To use an earlier example, to explain the behaviour of

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[11]David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth*, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991). Also see the more detailed discussion of Wiggins' marks of truth in chapter 2. For the moment I hope that an outline of his ideas will suffice.

someone who offers a chair to someone entering the room, we have to think that it is reasonable to offer a seat to someone under such circumstances and that the person who offers the chair is, like us, someone who both recognises the need for a chair, and recognises chairs. That is we have to see them as indulging in certain sorts of behaviour for which they have reasons we recognise, and as relating that behaviour to the circumstances we and they find ourselves in.

Given this notion of truth we then have the question of what is the status of what is revealed to us by this logical analysis. The picture we rejected above of subject observing and commenting on a world totally independent of his conception of it seemed to produce an intuitive notion that what truth delivers to us is the world as it is independent of any conception of it. If this is not the case then what does truth deliver to us? Truth regulates the applicability of a particular type of subject's conception to the world, whether this conception is a correct conception by the standards of what conceptions are possible for that sort of subject, what conceptions fit or belong to that type of subject's interaction with the world. So truth does not deliver the world as it is independent of any conception, it relates an individual's token conception to the type of conception suitable for that individual's type of subject/concept/world interaction. If the subject's type of interaction changes then the way he truly conceptualises the world will have changed, but truth itself will not have changed, it will still be what relates his new conception to his mode of interaction with the world. This does not mean that truth delivers objects that are a product of a conception, as if the conception were independent of the world, what it delivers is the world as conceptualised by a particular type of interaction with it. If truth is something that ranges over many possible conceptions of a world that is also capable of sustaining this variety of conceptions then it seems that what truth delivers to us is something independent of particular conceptions, but perceived in a particular way by each conception.

1.6 Thinking about the material world

To help clarify what I mean here I want to consider in general how we think about the material world, the world of medium sized physical objects and our place in it, to gain an understanding of rationality in this context and of how this type of analysis might work. As I said above, the everyday interaction that we have with the world, the discourse of material objects and our relations to them provides a basis for discovering our canons of truth and rationality. We see the world in terms of material objects and our reactions and relations to them are easily assessed both in linguistic and physical terms. We have a fairly clear idea of what is rational behaviour with respect to our relations to material objects; we get out of their way if they are heading for us, we use them in ways appropriate to their kind, we move them around or move around them in ways that suit our convenience, we know fairly clearly how to identify them and the sorts of things they might be expected to do. So can we use this mode of interaction with the world as a starting point? If we can use truth, and a concept of rationality derived from this mode of interacting, we can look at the patterns of use of this sort of language to gain an understanding of the world and ourselves in terms of material objects that could form a basis for moving on to understanding other modes of interaction that we have with the world.[12]

Do these notions of truth and rationality, however, give us a hold on our way of understanding things in material terms or are they just a product of this way of understanding? If they are just a product of this way of understanding things, would we be justified in moving on from this way of understanding or thinking about the world, to other different ways on the basis of this way? I argued above that truth was not a product of any particular way of thinking about the world, that it would continue

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[12]This is an approach that I develop in the latter half of chapter 4 and chapter 5 in an attempt to understand our moral interaction with the world based on Gareth Evans' methodology in investigating our interaction with the world of material objects.

to regulate any conception of the world as it and the subject/concept/world interaction it belonged to developed. Canons of rationality, however, might be relative to a particular way of thinking about the world. The sorts of rational reactions to and links between claims in material terms and material concepts are likely to be very different from the reactions to and links between, for example, mathematical concepts and claims. However, it seems likely that we will assess people as rational in general, at least initially, on the basis of their behaviour in and reactions to the material world, and only then will we feel capable of exploring other ways of thinking about things that they may have.

This raises the question, however, of whether the world has to be seen in terms of material objects just because we see it that way. Is this true? If this is raising the question of whether we have to see the world this way the answer seems to be that we do, at least until and unless we learn to interact with it in other ways. We see the world in terms of objects, and perhaps basically in terms of material objects. Abstract objects perhaps are linked to material objects but we have a tendency to feel that the only real things are the objects that we bump into as we move around the world. We may talk about abstract objects in the same sort of way as we do about concrete ones, but we somehow feel that they don't really exist in the world. To say that, however, is to revert to the picture of the world as it really is independently of anyone's interaction with it. That is to say that even if there were no human beings, or perhaps even animals, there would still be rocks and trees in the world, but there would be no numbers or colours or nations or games or food. So the rocks and trees are what really count as objects.

Do we really have a right to say this though? If, for example, we interacted with the world in terms of processes rather than objects we might be inclined to say that even if the world did not contain the processes that *we* are there would still be changings and growings but not human life processes. In which case there would be no absolute

sense in which we could say that there really are rocks and trees as opposed to changings and growings. The point is that if we are part of a subject/language/world interaction, then the sorts of objects produced by any interaction, provided that we can in some sense discover what they are, are all as real as the objects produced by any other interaction. Of course, if we came across someone who saw the world in terms of processes, or in some other way, it seems that if we were to understand them all it would have to be in terms that we could interpret as reacting to material objects. We, and presumably they also, would individuate these processes by means of the objects that were part of them. If we could not do this, I suspect that we would not even recognise these people as subjects conceptualising and interacting with the world and could therefore make no attempt to understand their species of interaction. So we, at present, have to see the world in terms of material objects. That does not, however, imply that everything that has an interaction with the world has to interact with it in terms of material objects, although it does imply that we would not recognise as an interaction with the world at all any interaction that we could not relate to our material object interaction.

So we can only come to share another's conception of the world if we have some common ground with them. We need to have some basis whereby we recognise them as capable of communicating with us and *vice versa,* some canons of rational behaviour that we share. It seems that recognition of and reactions to material objects can and would have to, in our case at least, provide this basis. Whether this other thinks of the world in terms of objects or processes, or some other way entirely, unless we can understand their behaviour in terms of interaction with a world of material objects we would have no basis for communication with them, and thus no way of assessing either their rationality or the truth of their judgements.

We still seem to be assuming, however, that even if this other responds to and interacts with material objects, he will be conceptualising the world in terms of the

same set of material objects that we do. Is this a fair assumption? If the world is conceptualised in terms of material objects, is there only one set of these objects that we and anyone else who conceptualises the world this way is bound to recognise, or might subjects who both conceptualise the world in terms of material objects, but use different faculties to recognise them, succeed in recognising different sets of such objects? Isn't it possible that other conceptions of the world could discover other objects either totally different from or in addition to the ones discovered by our conception? Isn't is arrogant of us to assume that the analysis of our view of the world will pick out the right objects, or even the only objects there are, even if we allow that different conceptions find different properties for these objects? Of course it might be argued that material objects just are the sorts of things we recognise by our senses of sight and touch, and that any things recognised by other senses, but not by ours will not count as material objects. Or can we argue that every conception of the world is picking out the same objects and attaching different properties to them? If so what happens if we come across a conception of the world which seems to recognise objects which we do not?

If we are using something like Wiggins' "marks of truth" to help us analyse our language, this is dependent on the possibility of communication and the transmission of meaning. The only way, however, that we seem able to assess that is by assessing another's behaviour, both linguistic and other behaviour, in the light of *our* conception of the world. We need to have some common ground in order to communicate, but if, given this, he seems to react to the world in a way that doesn't fit our conception on it, do we have any basis for judging between our conception and his? In the case of the individual it seems that we judge him as psychotic or irrational. He seems to see some aspects of the world our way, he eats and drinks and walks around the furniture rather than through it, but he also, for example, consistently avoids objects that are not detectable by us at all. We just seem to write off those aspects of his experience that we cannot relate to as delusory. We explain his behaviour in terms of beliefs he has,

but we think he is mistaken in applying some of his concepts. If he avoids one corner of the room because he thinks there is a table there, but we can walk through it, then we have to see him as imagining the table. Think of a more common case such as a child's imaginary friend. We may comply with requests to leave room for them at the table, but we relegate them to the realm of the imaginary. We are humouring the child, not conceding the existence of a real, but invisible, intangible person. We explain the child's or the psychotic's behaviour in terms or our `correct' understanding of the world.

Would this be a justifiable procedure in the case if a group of subjects? If we come across a group of people who, while agreeing with us on the general make-up of the world, claim to perceive a whole class of objects that we do not. Not only that, but they have a physical theory that encompasses these objects, and explains the world as we perceive it, at least as well as does our physical theory, and they claim that they have an extra faculty which allows them to perceive these objects. Would we then write off their experience? And if not, would we allow that they are perceiving objects which are not in any way detectable by us?

It might be argued that the above scenario is not intelligible, since if these `undetectable objects' play a part in their physical theory, then they ought to impinge on the objects that we recognise in a way that we can detect. If they are such that they do not, then it could be argued that, provided the new theory doesn't improve on our explanation of the world, there is no reason for us to attempt to incorporate into our model of the world, objects that do not impinge on it. But these objects do impinge on it in some way, since they provide an explanation for the behaviour of this group of people. We seem to have no other explanation for their behaviour except to class them as psychotic in some sense.

So what basis do we have for deciding whether they have access to a different conception of reality which includes objects ours does not and so is partially incomprehensible to us, or whether they are suffering from a group hallucination, or maintaining some obscure ritual? And if we are prepared to decide for the first option, why should the case of the individual be decided the other way? Is it that he does not even try to explain why we see things differently, and that if he or we could make a coherent attempt to encompass both viewpoints, then we would credit him with a different conception of the world?

This cannot be the case, since this is surely one of the things that neuro-science is trying to do. If we succeed, however, in finding a physical or psychological explanation for the psychotic's condition, we seem unlikely to class him as rational but different on the basis of this explanation. We are going to regard his behaviour as a deficit in normal human functioning. Yet it seems arrogant to insist that our conception of the world is the only possible correct one, at least in the terms of the objects it identifies. It may be that there are limits to a conception of the world that we can intelligibly hold, and that we would have to recognise those limits. I am not clear, however, that these have to be seen as limits applicable to all conceptions of the world. That, it seems, is what the first option outlined above does; it is happy with allowing other conceptions to identify new properties as long as they are attached to the old objects, but it doesn't want to allow new objects.

If we were to attempt to analyse the language of this "aberrant" group of people, we would have a whole class of propositions for which we personally had no truth/judgement distinction. So it seems that either we have to accept their analysis of their language, which it seems likely will allow a class of objects we cannot recognise. Or we have to say that there are propositions in their language which we have to assess as false, or possibly meaningless, since we cannot assess them as true.

1.7 Possibility of Lack of Truth/Judgement Distinction

If this is the case for some possible, but as yet undiscovered group of people, does it not cause a problem for analysis of our own conceptualisation. Can there be concepts like this in our own ways of thinking? Can it be the case that we can coherently conceive of things for which there is no truth/judgement distinction? If we can it seems that our project for discovering what is an object is going to be frustrated from the start. If truth is going to regulate our patterns of use of language and ways of thinking, and allow us to discover through logical analysis what objects there are, then can we afford to have propositions which allow of no truth/judgement distinction, at least by us?

It may seem, at first sight, that abstract objects are going to pose these sorts of questions for us. When we come to analyse the patterns of use of our language, we come across singular terms which certainly don't have, as their referents, physical objects, of which the paradigm examples are numbers or directions. But does the fact that there are no physical objects for these terms to refer to mean that we have no truth/judgement distinctions available to assess propositions concerning them? Are we to say that, because we identify such objects contextually, that is in terms of linguistic definitions, that the assessment of the truth of proposition containing them is a matter that is totally internal to language? And if so, does this leave us isolated in linguistic idealism?

I think not, because that is to forget the picture of the interrelation of language and the world that we are working with. There are two points to be made here. Firstly, that language is not something separate from the world, something independent of it which provides a commentary on it. Language is something which arises from and is part of our interaction with as well as our conception of the world. To say something is internal to language is to picture it as locked up in language, and bearing no essential

relation to the world. But even this concept of the world, unspecified as such, is part of our conceptual interaction with it. If language itself is a part of our interaction with the world of which we are a part, then whatever is part of language is in some sense also a part of the world, not apart from it, and whatever the world is it is part of what makes our language the language it is. This leads to the second point, which is that the lack of physical objects as referents for abstract singular terms does not need to be a problem for holding a truth judgement distinction with respect to them. With this picture of the interaction of subject, world and language, what gives abstract objects a truth/judgement distinction is something rooted in our practices, and therefore in our interaction with the world. Even if the truth judgement distinction in a particular case were wholly linguistic, that is not to isolate it from the world and our interaction with it but just to locate it in a particular part of that interaction.

Nevertheless there may still be a problem with evidence-transcendent truths. In the case of the people who detect objects undetectable to us, it seems possible that we can conceive that some such objects exist, since this seems to be the best explanation for their otherwise inexplicable behaviour; yet we appear to have no truth/judgement distinction that we can apply to statements about these objects. We seem to have to take these people's word for it as to whether there is an object of this sort present in any particular case. But is this really the case? This reduces the problem to one of verification. If we are working, however, on patterns of use of the language these people employ, then the enquiry we are engaged in is a conceptual one. We are looking, not at how we might verify the presence of these objects, but what users of this discourse are committed to in terms of behaviour, including other linguistic behaviour. To talk about this in terms used by Wiggins which will be discussed further in chapter 2, if these people converge on some belief, and if we can find no other explanation for their convergence, then we will have to take it that the

explanation for their convergence is the truth of that belief.[13] We might only have to provisionally allow the existence of these objects, unless our shared understanding with these people will eventually allow us to learn to detect these sorts of objects. Nonetheless it seems that we are not required to reject them, since they are not entirely irrelevant to our experience, even if it is only our experience of other's behaviour. So even for what are apparently evidence transcendent truths we have some way of deciding what will count as correct and incorrect linguistic usage, correct and incorrect ways of thinking; we know under which situations it would be rational to use such language, and under which it would not.

The approach I want to take, therefore, to discovering what both the world and the subject are found to be like by a particular type of interaction between subject and the world, is to consider the language and concepts used by the subject in appropriate situations and how these present the subject's situation in the world. I have argued that this is possible because, although we might think that language can present both the subject and the world in ways totally other than the way they are, this is not really so. It must be possible, since the three elements of any interaction are not completely divorced from one another, to achieve some understanding of the nature of the interaction from looking at the concepts and language used both in the course of and in describing that type of interaction. To do this we will need an understanding of truth as what regulates our use of concepts, and not just truth relative to a particular type of some interaction, but truth that can deal with any interactions that might occur, to allow for development of interactions and communication between those with differing types of interaction. Yet to have this possibility of communication and comparison between interactions, we need to have an area of common understanding, and a common notion of rationality, as a basis for the assessment of the truth of a situation as opposed to any individual's judgement about it. I have proposed that our

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[13]See discussion of the marks of truth in D Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth*, op.cit., p.147-52.

everyday language of dealing with a world of material objects could provide such a basis. I would also like to suggest that by considering how we might analyse this sort of basic situation, we will have acquired a model that can be adapted for use with respect to other areas of language and other modes of interaction with the world.

In the next chapter, therefore, I want to consider whether this approach can be applied to moral language and thought. One necessary pre-requisite for this approach is that the discourse or thought being considered must be the sort of discourse or thought to which truth as applicable. There is a history in ethics which claims that moral language is not making claims which can be true. They are either expressions of the feelings or beliefs of individuals or groups, or they are claims which are always in fact false because there are no moral properties or facts for them to be about. In the next chapter I want to examine the metaphysical positions one might hold with respect to ethics and whether these rule out moral discourse as one that is regulated by truth.

Chapter 2: Truth and Objectivity

If patterns of use regulated by truth and a grasp of the truth/judgement distinction are going to be the basis for discovering what sorts of things we must be to use moral language, then we must first discuss whether moral discourse is regulated by truth and whether the truth/judgement distinction holds in such a discourse or discourses.[1] This is not something we can decide in advance by declaring that there are no moral truths or facts because there are no objects of moral discourse for them to be about. This would be to beg the question at issue. What we can do is consider some metaethical views about truth and objectivity in moral discourse to see whether we have any grounds for ruling out truth as inapplicable to moral discourse.

2.1 Metaphysical Possibilities

I will begin, therefore, by discussing whether it is possible to maintain a metaphysical position which allows that moral language can be objective, that is be a candidate for truth, while still being relative to human ways of understanding and representing the world. These ways of understanding and representing the world do not have to be seen as not capturing something real merely because they are human ways of understanding and representing the world. I will start by looking at three possible classifications of metaethical positions as they are suggested by David Brink in his book `Moral Realism and the Foundation of Ethics'[2]. From this initial categorisation he goes on to study two contrasting moral positions, that of the Moral Realist and the Moral Constructivist. I would like to try and describe a third position, that of

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[1]It should be noted here that moral is used here in a very general manner, not in the specific sense of a language of obligations, principles etc. It is thus closer to `ethical' rather than `moral' as the terms are used by Bernard Williams in his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, (London: Fontana, 1985).

[2]David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundation of Ethics*, Cambridge Studies in Philosophy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Sophisticated Moral Realist. I think there is room for this position, which allows for a realism linked to our sensibilities, because Brink's categorisation of moral positions conflates some distinctions that are articulated in Michael Luntley's paper `On the Way the World is Independently of the Way we Take it to Be'.[3] By considering these distinctions, I hope to show how we can understand the Sophisticated Moral Realist position and what notion of truth might be applicable to it and the other positions.

David Brink delineates his classes of metaethical view by contrasting them with what he calls the common-sense view about the objectivity of the sciences. This common-sense view of the objectivity of the sciences he equates with realism and categorises as the view that

> "claims of the natural sciences ... [are] claims that purport to describe more or less accurately a world whose existence and nature are independent of our theorising about it ... and often succeed in describing such a world. Thus scientific terms refer to real features of the world, and the sciences provide us with successively more and more accurate knowledge of the world."[4]

Here is how he describes the three views he identifies:

> 1) Realism about science and antirealism about ethics: The common-sense view about the objectivity of the sciences is roughly right; ethics is not (and cannot be) objective in this way. There is a special problem about realism or objectivity in ethics. Traditional nihilists, noncognitivists (e.g., emotivists and prescriptivists), moral skeptics,

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[3]Michael Luntley, `On the Way the World is Independently of the Way we Take it to Be' in *Inquiry*, 32 (1989) 177-194.
[4]Brink, p.7

and relativists can be viewed as holding this position on our comparative issue.

2) Realism about science and ethics: The common-sense view about the objectivity of the sciences is roughly right; ethics is or can be objective in much the same way. Although many traditional cognitivists found important disanalogies and discontinuities between ethics and the sciences, most of them, including the intuitionists (e.g., Richard Price, Thomas Reid, Sidgwick, Moore, Ross, Broad, and H.A.Prichard), believed that ethics does or can possess these marks of objectivity.

3) The third view is harder to label: Some will regard it as global subjectivism or antirealism, others as a sophisticated realism about both ethics and science. The idea is that, although ethics cannot fit the common-sense view of scientific objectivity, this establishes nothing interesting about the objectivity of ethics, since science itself does not satisfy the common-sense view of scientific objectivity. The common-sense view of scientific objectivity is naive; once we understand the objectivity obtainable in the sciences, we can see that ethics is or can be every bit as objective as the sciences. Although it is natural for sympathizers with view (1) or (2) to regard (3) as global subjectivism or antirealism, proponents of (3) often regard their position as realist or objectivist. Presumably, they think it makes sense to call a position about the status of ethics or science antirealist only if there is some discipline whose status is more realistic or objective than that of ethics or science. Since they think that more realistic views are naive and

> that nothing actually possesses that kind of objectivity, they regard their views about ethics and science as realistic."[5]

The first thing I want to note about these categorisations is that for Brink realism and objectivity seem to be interchangeable terms. The essential elements of his realism are that the existence and nature of the world are independent of our theorising about them, and that our theorising does succeed in capturing and describing, with some degree of accuracy, the features of the world. The world is as it is independently of what or how we think about it, and yet we can obtain a true, or partially true picture of the world. The important notions here are independence and truth or accuracy. Both realism and objectivity seems to be equated both with the independence of the world from our theorising about it and the accuracy of that theorising. Thus he says on p.7 that a moral realist claims that there are moral facts and true moral claims whose existence and nature are independent of our beliefs about what is right and wrong. Later, on p.20, he claims that ethics is objective because firstly it concerns matters of fact and holds that moral claims can be true or false, and secondly that these facts hold independently of anyone's beliefs about what is right or wrong. That seems to be why, although he uses the term sophisticated realist, he is dubious about using it for a position he would prefer to call antirealist, since it may not allow for the world to be independent of our theorising about it in quite the way he wants. I will look at the distinctions we might make with respect to `real' and `objective' later in this chapter and see how they might be applied to the realist and the constructivist, but for now I would like to clarify some of the points Brink is making and show how the position of the sophisticated realist can arise out of the methodology discussed in the previous chapter. Brink characterises the realist and the constructivist as holding two metaphysical theses:

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[5]Brink, p.6-7

Realist: (1) There are facts or truths of a kind x, and

(2) These facts or truths are independent of the evidence for them

Constructivist (1) There are facts or truths of a kind x, and

(2) These facts or truths are constituted by the evidence for them.[6]

So both start with the thesis that there are facts or truths, and differ about their constitution. They are called truths because they are the sort of things about which true claims can be made. To see what it means for claims to be true in each case I want to adapt a formulation of Brink's [p.20] that will allow us to compare the realist and constructivist theses.

Realist: For the realist a claim C states a fact x (C is true) just in case x is such a fact.

Constructivist:For the constructivist a claim C states a fact for the subject (S), (C is true for S) just in case S believes C, S would believe C upon reflection, S is part of a social group the majority of whom believe C, S would believe C in favourable or ideal epistemic conditions, or some such thing.[7]

The Constructivist thesis here is really a number of different constructivist positions. Thus for some constructivists C is true for S just in case S believes C, for others it is true just in case S would believe C upon reflection, for others again just in case S is part of a social group the majority of whom believe C, all classified by Brink as relativist positions. For the non relativists, Brink says, "there is a single set of facts

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[6]Brink., p.16
[7]Brink, p.20

that are constituted by some function of our beliefs, often by our moral beliefs in some favorable or idealized epistemic conditions."[8]

In fact it is hard to see how the first of these positions makes any claim to truth at all. If a claim is true for a subject if the subject believes it, then that subject would have no false beliefs at all, there would be no distinctions to be made between considered and ill-considered opinions. Anything the subject believed at all, for whatever reasons, would, by definition, be true. I cannot see how such a position can be laying any claim at all to truth. The other positions have at least some hold on a distinction between the subject's beliefs and the truth of those beliefs. Some of his beliefs can be false because there are some constraints on the truth of the subjects beliefs. Since what Brink is claiming is that objectivity, and therefore truth, in ethics has some special problem, I think we can take it that the first position, having no objectivity at all, can be dropped from consideration.

Thus, as Brink states them, both the Realist and the Constructivist say that the claims made by subjects state facts and are capable of being true, but when we look more closely we see that either they mean something different by what it is for claims to state facts or by what it is for claims to be true. For the realist a claim states a fact if it has content, it is about something, and is a true claim if there is such a fact as that stated by the claim, that is the claim captures some actual state of affairs. Here the fact at issue cannot be just any fact which causes the truth of the claim, it must be the fact on which the truth of the claim rests. To borrow an example from David Wiggins[9], what makes `It is cold here' a true claim is that the content of the claim, that is the coldness in the vicinity, captures the fact of coldness in the vicinity. The fact

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[8]Brink, p.20

[9]David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth, Essays in the Philosophy of Value*, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp.142-3.

that the heating engineer failed to call last week may be a fact that is a cause of the truth of the claim, but it is not the fact on which the truth of the claim rests.

For the constructivist there seem to be several possibilities. At first sight the constructivist seems to hold that the claim states a fact if it has content, is about something. So, for example, Brink suggests a moral claim might be something like `Abortion is wrong', which would seem to be about the wrongness of abortion. What makes it true, however, is not its capturing the wrongness of abortion but, in the case of the first type of constructivist, its matching with the subject's beliefs upon reflection. In the case of the second type it would be matching with the beliefs of the majority of his social group, or in the case of the third type, its matching with his beliefs in favourable or ideal epistemic conditions. This way of understanding the relation between the content of the claim and its truth makes it sound a little like the case of the heating engineer. Just as a claim about coldness is not a claim about heating engineers, despite the fact that the coldness is caused by the heating engineer's behaviour, similarly a claim about the wrongness of something is not obviously a claim about some people's beliefs even if they do believe it to be wrong. If the claim is about the wrongness of abortion, then the truth of the claim should rest in the wrongness of abortion, not on some other fact about the beliefs of an individual or group members under some conditions. Although the beliefs of the individual or group members may not be the cause of abortion's wrongness, as the absence of the heating engineer is the cause of the coldness, facts about beliefs do not, at first sight, seem to be facts about the wrongness of abortion. The constructivist has to explain how the apparently straightforward content of his claim is linked to the fact about his or other's beliefs, such that it is these beliefs that make the claim true. This seems to require either a different account of truth from that of the realist, an account which explains how the truth of a claim rests not on a fact captured by the claim's content, but on some other fact, or a different account of the content of a claim, which explains how a claim's content is other than what it appears to be at first sight. That is, either

the content of the claim is the wrongness of abortion, but what makes the claim true is its having captured something other than the content of the claim, or the content of the claim is a fact about beliefs and thus its truth does rely on its having captured the content of the claim. In the first case the account of truth differs from the realist's, and in the second the account of content differs from the realist's.

The problem here is that Brink's formulation equates stating a fact (in my terms, having content) with being true. But in the two ways I have suggested looking at the Constructivist's position, stating a fact, having content, is attempting to capture something, and being true rests on what is captured matching with some fact. So there is a putative fact that the claim captures with its content and there is a fact on which the truth of the claim rests. The problem for the constructivist is that, even in the case of true claims, either these facts are not the same fact, or if they are, then a different account of what it is to have content is required. In the first case we want to ask how the truth of a claim rests on some fact other than the one captured by the content, and in the second we want to ask how the content captures the fact on which the truth of the claim rests. Or to put things another way, we might think that in the first case the claim has no content because there is no fact about the wrongness of abortion to be captured, but only a fact about beliefs, and thus the first case collapses into the second case, in which the fact captured is the fact about beliefs, but we don't know how a claim that purportedly says something about the wrongness of abortion is actually saying something about beliefs.

The constructivist might argue that these are both distortions of his position; that a claim does aim to express a fact, for example the wrongness of abortion, and that it is true if that fact is captured. It is just that the fact of the wrongness of abortion consists in or is constituted by the individual's or group's belief about abortion. This is, in effect, to take the second option, to provide an account which shows how saying something about the wrongness of abortion is saying something about beliefs, the

beliefs of the individual or the group he belongs to. The problem with this is that the individual's or group's beliefs cannot themselves be characterised as true or false in any terms other than their own, or even criticised as better or worse beliefs, since there seems to be no basis for argument or discussion about the merits of such beliefs. That is, when people belonging to different groups claim that abortion is right or wrong their claims do not have the same content. They neither agree nor disagree. If they both claim that abortion is wrong, the wrongness of abortion in each case refers to different sets of beliefs and so they are not making the same claim, and a similar problem arises if they apparently disagree. There is not just one fact about the wrongness of abortion, there are as many as there are different sets of beliefs, and they all seem to have equal status, and so cannot be the same sort of facts that Brink is talking about with respect to the realist. There is no single arena in which the apparently competing claims can be assessed as true or false. The claims of each group about abortion are tautologies. If what it means for abortion to be wrong is that the group has certain beliefs about abortion, then the group's claim that abortion is wrong is merely an affirmation of their beliefs and not an appeal to any other standard than theirs. The individual can make a true or false claim when assessed against the beliefs of his group, but the claim that the group makes cannot be false, there is no distinction for the group between their judgment of the claim and its truth. This is, I suppose, what Brink means to suggest when he says that in the constructivist picture a claim states a moral fact for the subject. There is not only one moral fact expressed by the claim that abortion is wrong, there are many deriving from the different individuals and social groups who have beliefs about abortion, and none of them are truths outside the beliefs of the individual or group. So again it may be argued that the content of the constructivist's claim does not state a fact in quite the same way that the realist's does. Further, if there are many of these `facts' it is difficult to see what the content of the constructivist's claim is without explicit indexing to his community or particular epistemic conditions. That is, until we know what type of constructivist he is we cannot say what it is he is claiming when he says `Abortion is wrong'. It is

not just that we cannot compare his claim to the claims of others because their content is different, but that we cannot say what that content is without knowing what set of beliefs it was aiming to express.

A possible exception here is the case of beliefs arrived at under ideal or favourable epistemic conditions. A lot will hang on what is included in the notion of such conditions. If the conditions are epistemic conditions, ones where knowledge is available, then favourable or ideal conditions should be ones which allow us to obtain knowledge, not merely opinions. The beliefs arrived at under such conditions should, surely, be beliefs about whatever it is the favourable or ideal conditions will give knowledge of. Either the constructivist is here claiming that ideal or favourable epistemic conditions will give knowledge of the wrongness of abortion, or they will give knowledge of individual or group beliefs. If in saying the former we are claiming that what such conditions give knowledge of is something beyond or other than the beliefs of individuals or groups, something that they have beliefs about, then the claims made do seem to be candidates for truth, they will be true in virtue of something other than beliefs, but this is not a constructivist position, it is a realist one. There are facts which are not facts about beliefs but about abortion and its wrongness, and this is what we have knowledge of under favourable conditions. If the latter is what is being claimed, that favourable or ideal epistemic conditions give knowledge of a group or individual's beliefs, then again we have a problem with what the content of the claim is without indexing it to the individual's community or upbringing or some such thing. Even if we can identify the content of the claim, it will turn out that different groups are not disagreeing or making claims against each other, because their claims will have different contents. What is wrong with this position is that it seems to claim that beliefs do not have to bear any relation to anything other than beliefs. The individual's beliefs about abortion can be true or false when checked against his group's beliefs, or against his own considered beliefs, but there are no criteria for assessing the group's beliefs or the individual's considered beliefs. The group or

individual may change their views, but it will not apparently be in response to anything, because those beliefs are not about anything other than themselves. If this is the case then they do not have any content, they are not about anything, since if we ask what belief X is about and the only answer is 'belief X' this can tell us nothing. Further, if we do not know, and cannot know what it is about, we cannot know whether it is true or false. If it has no content there is nothing to match up to or to be assessed against, there is nothing the truth of which it is trying to capture. Now, obviously beliefs may be wrong or mistaken on any individual occasion, but if they are not even aiming at capturing the truth about something, then it is questionable whether they count as beliefs rather than inventions or imagination. Of course the individual is aiming at capturing his own or his society's beliefs in any claim, but if those beliefs themselves are not aimed at capturing something other than themselves, why are they beliefs? Thus we have the possibility of an individual expressing a belief by the claim 'Abortion is wrong' which can be true or false, because the wrongness of abortion is constituted by his group's or community's belief, and yet the group or community is using the same form of words. 'Abortion is wrong' to fail to express a belief at all. The individual is aiming at capturing something by his claim but the community, by making apparently the same claim, is not.

So far, then, I have suggested that for the realist a claim is true if its content captures the fact it aims to express. For the constructivist there are apparently several ways for a claim to be true. Either it is true if it captures the right one of a number of different facts about beliefs it could be understood as aiming to express, if that fact is constituted by the beliefs of individuals or groups. Or alternatively, the constructivist's claim is true either if its content captures a fact, which is not, at first sight, the one it aims to express, or if there is a fact about the beliefs of a subject or his social group, which is not the fact expressed by the content of the claim. In either of these cases there is a problem with the status of the beliefs held by the individual or group itself as to whether they can be assessed as true, that is, are themselves facts or

truths, and if not whether they count as beliefs at all. Finally, if the constructivist holds that his facts are constituted by beliefs formed under ideal or favourable epistemic circumstances where these are not circumstance for gaining knowledge of the individual's or group's beliefs but of something those beliefs are about, the truth of an individual's claim will relate to these beliefs, but the beliefs themselves will have to relate to something else which the specification of ideal or favourable epistemic conditions allows knowledge of. This is more like what it is for the realists claim to be true, but then the fact the truth of the claim rests on does not seem to be constituted by the beliefs arrived at under favourable or ideal epistemic conditions, but is what those beliefs are about.

Where does the sophisticated realist stand in this debate? Brink does not attempt to characterise the sophisticated realist's position, because he does not see this position as his main opposition. If we wanted to consider the sophisticated realist's position, however, I would argue that one way of doing so at least would not be comparable with Brink's characterisation of the realist and the constructivist, because it would not have the same starting point. Both the realist and the constructivist start from metaphysical claims about facts and their nature. I think the sophisticated realist's position is best captured by considering him as someone who uses the methodology outlined in the previous chapter; that is, someone who does not start from a particular metaphysical position but who finds his metaphysical position by analysing the patterns of his language use.

The sophisticated realist, rather than starting with facts and seeing what the presumed nature of his facts tells him about truth, starts with truth and sees what the importance of contrasting factual judgements with the truth about those facts tells us about their nature. That is, he starts with truth and sees what the nature of the truth/judgement distinction in moral discourse forces him to say about facts. This is not to make any assumptions about the nature of truth either, but merely to recognise, and make use of,

our practice of distinguishing between a judgement and its truth. This practice imposes constraints not only on the claims the sophisticated realist makes but also on the way he thinks about the world and the way he understands the relationship between his thoughts and the world they are about. Thus the sophisticated realist, although he may well arrive at the position that there are moral truths, claims neither that these truths are wholly independent of the ways we have of knowing them, our evidence for them, nor that they are constituted by and thus solely dependent on that evidence. His claim would rather be that, because the way we conceptualise or understand the world is regulated by truth, the truths we aim for in making claims are truths accessible to particularly human ways of thinking. They are independent of the evidence for them in that any claim may fail to capture the truth, but not in that all that could count as the truth is something that could fail to be capturable by human ways of thinking. Nonetheless these truths are not constituted by human ways of thinking, since the truth may require us not just to modify a claim, but to modify our ways of thinking about something, as it does, for example, in the sciences. We once thought about heat in terms of an undetectable substance, caloric, which was contained in anything hot; but the truth about heat as a phenomenon we experience has forced us to revise our way of thinking in favour of understanding heat in terms of the motion of molecules, and may yet force us to revise it further.

So for the sophisticated realist who claims that abortion is wrong, the content of his claim would be the wrongness of abortion, and its truth would rest in abortion's wrongness, as it does for the realist. The difference is that, for the realist, abortion's wrongness is a fact about the world that requires no reference to our ways of understanding it. This is not so for the sophisticated realist. It is not constituted by our ways of understanding moral facts, as it would be for the constructivist, but it is not wholly independent of them either.

2.2 Objective, absolute reality?

To see how the sophisticated realist's position could be maintained I want to consider three sets of distinctions drawn by Michael Luntley[10]: the objective/subjective distinction, the absolute/relative distinction and the reality/appearance distinction. Luntley claims that these are all distinctions with respect to the notion of mind-(in)dependence, and so are often conflated, but that the concerns they express are separable and that it will be helpful if we focus on them more clearly. The objective/subjective distinction is a distinction with reference to truth. A proposition, statement or claim is objective if it is understood as being aimed at truth and capable of being true or false. Here if the claim is aimed at truth, then the independence of truth of our knowledge of it and thus of our minds is what makes a claim objective. That is, there is a potential difference between how things are and how they seem to a subject. If that difference is not available, if how things are just is how they seem to the subject, then the proposition or claim made by the subject is subjective. There is no possibility of the claim's being true despite the way it seems to the subject. A subjective claim is mind-dependent because there is nothing beyond the subject's mind that the claim is true in virtue of. An objective claim is mind-independent because there is something other than how things seem to the subject's mind, and it is in virtue of this that the claim is true.

The absolute/relative distinction concerns mind-(in)dependence in a different way. It is concerned with concepts and refers to the type of mind required for the detection of a particular property. If that detection does not require any particular type of mind the concept used is absolute. If the property does require a particular type of mind to detect it then that concept is in this sense mind-dependent and relative. What is meant here by a particular type of mind can be illustrated by the idea of primary and

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[10]On the Way the World is Independently of the Way we Take it to Be, *op.cit.*

secondary qualities. Luntley argues that any creature which has some notion of investigating an environment it shares with others will be able to recognise and distinguish between the positions and shapes of various objects regardless of its type of perceptual system. That is, size, shape, position and motion are properties and relations that are detectable by a variety of sensory modalities (vision, touch, radar, sonar etc.), and any creature that lives and moves in the spatial world must be able to detect these properties and relations. Detection of properties such as colour and taste, however, require a particular type of perceptual system. There may be properties and relations that we cannot detect because we do not have the right type of perceptual system; for example bats may detect something akin to the texture of objects by sonar, which we do not, just as the bat does not see in colour. Thus, as Luntley puts it "We will converse with Martians about the mechanics of falling apples, but not their colour"[11]. Or to put it more mundanely, both the bull and I may know the fastest route across the field but contrary to folklore the bull will not be sensitive to the redness of my shirt.

There is however another sense of the mind-(in)dependence of concepts which the reality/appearance distinction brings out. Here, again using colour as an example Luntley says that the idea that colour is only an apparent property does not immediately follow from the fact that it is relative. In order to get any hold on the idea that relative properties are not real we need to add into the absolute/relative distinction something like a representative theory of perception. Thus when we perceive a tomato, what happens is that the tomato produces an idea in us and the redness we perceive is "more properly a property of the Idea than the object".[12] In this case the property is apparent because it is a property of the idea and not of the world; real properties are properties of the world, not of ideas. When the bat is able, if

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[11]Luntley, p.183.
[12]Luntley, p.185

it is, to detect the texture of an object and I am able to detect it's colour, this does not require us to say that neither `sonar texture' nor colour are real properties of the world, merely that they are ones not detectable unless you have the right sort of mind. In fact, when I say that the bat has the sort of mind that can detect 'sonar texture' and I have the sort of mind that can perceive colour, I am implying that 'sonar texture' and colour are properties that belong to the objects independently of whether the sorts of minds I and the bat use to detect them exist. So if we do not hold a representative theory of perception, then colour and sonar texture can be real relative properties and claims about them can be objective. If, on the other hand, we are committed to a representative theory of colour or sonar perception, then we hold that perceiving an object produces an idea, a mental item, and that the properties we attribute (wrongly) to the object, are in fact properties of that mental item or idea. They would then only apparently (not really) be properties of the object, and thus would be dependent on a mind in which the idea and its properties are produced. Claims about colour or sonar properties would then still be objective, provided that there are types of mind which have types of ideas produced in them by objects, and the properties themselves would now be relative to the type of mind that has them, but also they would only be apparent properties of the object, because they would really be properties of the idea or mental state produced in that type of mind by such objects.

So, for example, the claim that there is a blackboard in this room is an objective claim, whereas the claim that I am having a black, rectangular sense datum might be seen as subjective; the shape of the blackboard is an absolute property of the blackboard, and its blackness is a relative property of it, because only a creature who perceived the world in terms of colour would see it as black. However, to make the move to the real/apparent distinction is to distinguish between the claim that the blackness is a property of the blackboard that is only detectable by creatures with colour perception, and the claim that it is a property of ideas, not of blackboards at all.

When we apply these distinctions to Brink's Moral Realist and Moral Constructivist what we get is that the Moral Realist is making objective claims using absolute concepts and real properties and relations. The claims made aim at truth and are about the properties and relations of things that exist independently of whether the subject is capable of conceptualising them. Actually it is not clear whether Brink thinks that these concepts are absolute in Luntley's sense. For example, 'sonar texture' might exist independently of our capability of conceptualising it, but that would not make it absolute. So perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the Moral Realist's claims are objective, because they aim at truth, and the properties and relations he recognises are real, but it is unclear whether they are relative or absolute. Brink says "The moral realist thinks that our moral claims not only purport to but often do state facts and refer to real properties, and that we can and do have at least some true moral beliefs and moral knowledge".[13]

Since, according to Brink, the Moral Constructivist holds that there are facts or truths, he also holds that his claims are objective, although as I have shown this is open to dispute. The constructivist says nothing explicitly about the absolute/relative distinction, although if moral properties and facts are constituted by the evidence for them, which Brink construes as constituted by human beliefs it would seem that they must be mind-dependent in the third sense, that is apparent properties. Although I argued above that a property's being apparent does not follow from its being relative, it does look as if its being relative follows from its being apparent. If the wrongness of abortion is constituted by beliefs that `Abortion is wrong' then that wrongness is surely not a property of abortion that anyone could detect, it can only be detected by the sort of mind that understands about wrongness and mistakenly attributes it to abortion, rather than beliefs about abortion. It is not a real property, nor is it a property of beliefs so much as one constituted by beliefs, but it is, perhaps on this

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[13]Brink, p.7

account, a property of the constructivist's idea of abortion rather than of abortion itself. The implication is that although for the constructivist there are moral truths, his moral claims do not refer to real properties and, although he might have moral knowledge this knowledge is of his beliefs, or his community's beliefs, or what his beliefs would be under ideal or favourable epistemic conditions.

As we have seen above, however, there is a problem for the constructivist as to whether his facts are truths or not. That is, although there may be a fact of the matter as to what the individual or his group believe about abortion, whether these beliefs are themselves the sorts of things that can be true and are therefore truths is something that is still open to question. The moral knowledge he has is knowledge of his own or his groups beliefs, and these beliefs themselves do not contain knowledge and are not held to be capable of being true. Thus it seems that the constructivist's claims are not objective, because the facts he states, or seems to state, in them are not truths, the properties and relations they identify are apparent, not real, and therefore they are also relative to the type of mind that thinks that way about things.

This does seem to leave a space for what I want to call a Sophisticated Moral Realist who would hold that there are moral properties of the world, but that these are only detectable by a creature with a certain sort of mind. The only evidence we may have for these properties will be in terms of our responses to and beliefs about them, but they will not, on that account have to be constituted wholly by those beliefs and responses. If there is a possibility that claims about them could be true or false, then they would be objective claims responding to properties that are real but relative to our way of perceiving the world. The Sophisticated Realist shares with the Realist that the properties he detects are properties of the world, not of our beliefs, but they are properties of a world that can only be conceptualised by creatures who are capable of relating to it in a particular way.

This would perhaps be more clearly seen if we consider the possible combinations of the three classes of mind-(in)dependence. Objectivity is compatible with the recognition of either absolute or relative properties or relations, that is claims about both absolute and relative properties and relations can be candidates for truth. There is a problem with whether objectivity is compatible with concepts being apparent or real. If, for example, colour is only an apparent property of objects, but nevertheless I make colour judgments about objects, then the judgments could be objective. It depends whether judgments about colour respond to something in the object. In the traditional understanding of colour as a secondary property, the colour of the idea I have is a response to some real property of the object; the real properties of the object produce a coloured idea in me. If this is so then it does not seem to affect the objectivity of judgments whether the colour is a real or an apparent property. If it is an apparent property then the objective judgment will be about what coloured idea the object will produce in me reliably under normal viewing conditions. The problem comes if we think, as we might be tempted to do in the case of moral properties, that the apparent property is not a response to some real property of objects. That is, if the wrongness of abortion is a property of my idea of abortion that does not reflect or respond to any of the real properties of abortion; if there is nothing about abortion that produces that sort of idea in me, then there is no being right or wrong about it. In this case the apparent property is not compatible with objective judgments, since there seems to be no reason why I should not have different ideas about abortion on different occasions.

So judgments can be objective, independently of whether the concepts used are absolute or relative. If the properties and relations identified are real, the judgment will be objective, but if those properties and relations are thought of as apparent, then the judgments can only be objective if the apparent property is a response to some real property of the object. If it is not then the judgment must be subjective and the concept must be relative, which in fact it must be whenever the property or relation is

apparent. So we can have objective judgments using absolute or relative real concepts, objective judgements using relative apparent concepts provided they are a response to some real properties of the object the judgments are about, and subjective judgments about relative, apparent concepts where the apparent concept is not a response to any real properties or relations of the object.

What the realist and the constructivist have in common is that they both start from the nature of moral facts and define objectivity or truth in terms of the nature of those facts. That is, for the realist, moral concepts are real and absolute, and this means that the truth/judgment distinction can place truth beyond the possibility of human knowledge, truth can be evidence-transcendent. For the constructivist, moral concepts are relative and apparent, in the sense of not responding to any real properties in the world. In Luntley's terms this makes the constructivist's moral claims subjective. The constructivist can at best claim that an individual's claims have some correctness (not truth) by referring them to some standard (his own beliefs upon reflection, his community's beliefs, or beliefs under some ideal conditions) which is not itself objective. The Sophisticated Moral Realist, however, starts not from the nature of facts, but from objectivity. He does not claim that his facts are a certain way and therefore that truth must be a certain way. He starts from the objectivity of his claims and sees what options this leaves for him in terms of the nature of his facts. That is, he takes at face value the objectivity of moral claims. Given that some of our claims are that not everything is apparently equipped to understand or respond to situations in moral terms, he has to take moral concepts as relative. He is then in a position to ask whether his concepts are real or apparent. So the Sophisticated Moral Realist has available to him the possibility that his claims are candidates for truth, even though the concepts used in those claims are only available to certain types of minds, and that the properties and relations identified in those claims are either real, or if they are apparent they are a response to real properties of the situation the claim is about.

The question then arises, how does the Sophisticated Moral Realist deal with the objection that moral properties are apparent in the sense that would make moral judgments subjective; that is that they do not respond to anything real at all. The first response is to say that if moral claims are objective, are subject to a truth/judgment distinction, then they cannot be apparent in a way that would lead to such claims being subjective. Yet it might be argued that moral claims cannot be really objective because we have no way of checking them that is independent of our responses to moral situations. We have some independent hold on what true colour claims might be in terms of the knowledge of the physical mechanisms of colour perception and objective measurement of colours reflected by objects, none of which is available for moral claims. I would note, however, that we base our standards and definitions of correctly functioning colour vision on the ability of individuals to respond correctly to colour charts and tests, and the identification of particular wavelengths of light with particular colours is also based on these responses. That is, our understanding of the physical mechanisms of colour perception depends on what counts as truth in colour identification, which in turn depends on how we generally respond to colour properties. Objectivity in colour claims does not principally derive from our understanding of the mechanism of colour perception or the identification of its relation to wavelengths of light. The dependence is the other way around. It is only because of the objectivity of colour claims that we can understand the mechanisms involved. Although we may have difficulty in the moral case in saying what correctly functioning moral `perception' would be, or an independent way of measuring moral properties, this does not force us to say that moral claims cannot be objective. Again the priority can be the other way around, the objectivity of moral claims would have to be the basis of any understanding of the mechanisms, if any, of moral 'perception'. Only if we can show that moral claims are not objective, that there is no truth in moral judgment, can we assert that moral properties are apparent in this way. I do not think the Sophisticated Moral Realist position can be ruled out unless we can show that

there is no distinction to be made in his case between true moral judgements and mere moral opinions.[14]

So, for the realist there are real moral properties and relations in the world that are conceptualisable in absolute terms and he has the possibility of making objective claims using these concepts: the moral aspects of the world are capturable by our concepts and claims provided we conceptualise the world the way it is independently of the moral way of relating to it. For the constructivist moral properties and relations are apparent because they are functions of the beliefs, or rather opinions, of moral subjects. Because of this they require no reference to anything other than the opinions, rather than beliefs, of moral subjects. Moral claims can, at best, be subjective, since they are not really aimed at expressing truths but only opinions; they do not capture the way the world is, they capture the way moral subjects are, and the facts they purport to be about would not exist if there were no moral subjects. The sophisticated realist also arrives at the position that there are real moral properties in the world, although they are conceptualisable in relative, rather than absolute terms. He accepts the possibility of making objective claims using these concepts, but these concepts are not concepts that are available independently of a particular way, the moral way, of relating to the world. To maintain this position, however, he needs to hold that there is a difference between moral judgments and their truth. To see how the Sophisticated Moral Realist might maintain a truth/judgement distinction, I want to consider truth from the point of view of the marks of plain truth, a concept

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[14]D McNaughton makes a related claim in his *Moral Vision*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.57, where he says that we do not need a special perceptual mechanism for moral observation. We take it in other cases that we can see more than just shapes or colour, the proper objects of perception. "If [. . .] we are prepared to allow that I can see that this cliff is dangerous, that Smith is worried or that one thing is further away than another, then there seems no reason to be squeamish about letting in moral observation. [. . .] Here as elsewhere, the realist sees no difference in kind between the moral case and others."

introduced by David Wiggins.[15] This is not a theory of truth but a characterisation of the marks by which our ordinary concept of truth bears. Something like this seems to be necessary if the Sophisticated Moral Realist is to be justified in claiming that his moral discourse distinguishes between truth and judgment.

2.3 Truth and Moral Discourse

Wiggins starts from a relationship between the meaning of a sentence and its truth value:

> "Sentence **S** has as its literal use to say declaratively that **p** (henceforth for short, **S** means that **p**) just if whether **S** is true or not depends upon whether **p**."[16]

This relationship is generally used to discover something about meaning, given a theory of truth; that is, we use our conception of truth to tell us something about meaning. Wiggins turns this round and tries to elucidate something about truth given that "we think we understand more than nothing about what declarative meaning is"[17]. As was pointed out above, if the truth of a sentence (claim) rests on whether it has content which captures a fact, the content and the sentence have to have the right sort of relationship to get the meaning of the sentence from its truth. Thus the connection between **p** and **S** must be a semantic connection. To get this semantic connection, Wiggins uses the Tarskian conception of a truth theory for an object

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[15]Wiggins, in *Needs, Values, Truth. Essays in the Philosophy of Value*, 2nd edn., Oxford, Blackwell, 1991. I will draw principally on the account in Essay IV, *Truth as Predicated of Moral Judgments*. Slightly different accounts appear earlier in the book in Essay III, *Truth, Invention and the Meaning of Life*, and in D Wiggins, 'What would be a Substantial Theory of Truth?' in *Philosophical Subjects: Essays presented to PF Strawson*, ed. Z van Straaten, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

[16]Needs, Values, Truth, p. 141.

[17]Wiggins, p. 141.

language. Unfortunately, to get true-in-L for L you need to be able to use the concept of translation; the object language sentence needs to be translatable into the meta-language, and thus there is meaning on both sides of the bi-conditional. Wiggins therefore draws on Davidson's ideas to replace the concept of translation with that of the radical interpretation of an L-speaker in terms of a theory of truth-in-L and a descriptive anthropology of L-speakers. That is:

> *s* means in L that *p*
>
> if and only if
>
> for any theory θ of truth-in-L that combines with a descriptive anthropology to make sense of the shared life and conduct of L-speakers and that makes better sense than any rival combination consisting of a variant theory of truth and variant descriptive anthropology, it is derivable from θ that *s* is true in L if and only if *p*.[18]

What Wiggins means by a descriptive anthropology is one that "will seek to distribute predicates . . . across features of reality, mental states and actions in such a way that the propositional attitudes it ascribes to speakers are intelligible in the light of the true descriptions it gives of features of reality, and the actions that it ascribes to speakers are intelligible in the light of propositional attitudes it ascribes to them."[19] That is, the interpreter tries to make sense of the speaker by relating his speech and actions to the environment they share in terms of beliefs about that environment. Later in the same paper Wiggins says

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[18]Needs, Values, Truth, p. 145.

[19]D Wiggins, Truth and Interpretation, in *Language, Philosophy & Logic, Proceedings of the 4th International Wittgenstein Symposium* (August 1979), eds. Leinfellner, Haller, Hübner, Weingartner (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1980), pp. 38-9.

> "insofar as the idea of a norm of rationality to be grasped by the interpreter requires the idea of information, and insofar as the discrimination of good from bad information has its rational culmination in belief, it is the idea of the communication of belief that I have had to see as organising the interpreter's search for what speakers say. For it is the idea of reciprocal governance between what beliefs speakers can discriminate and respond to in the particular environment impinging on them that provides us with a justification for using that environment itself as a partially independent clue to what it is that speakers believe and may, as they please, say or not say."[20]

Thus the interpreter starts with the idea that he and the speaker share some common orientation towards the environment they find themselves in, in the light of which he ascribes beliefs about that environment to the speaker, and assumes that the speaker's utterances will be about that environment. From this starting point a theory of truth, a richer descriptive anthropology and an interpretation of speaker's utterances develop together. This is the position of the radical interpreter.

What Wiggins wants to do is to turn this process around and argue that since we have some understanding of what people in our own language community mean, we can use the concept of radical interpretation to find out something about truth. Radical interpretation allows us to ask "What must sentences that are true in L be like (what properties must they have) if a sentence's being such as to mean in L that **p** is to consist in the best (or equal best) sense-making theory's delivering a Tarskian equivalence in the for `**S** is true in L if and only if **p**'?"[21] Since the procedure should still work, whatever particular language L is, since L is variable, this should give not

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[20]Truth and Interpretation, p.41. This is compatible with my second picture of the relation of the subject and his concepts to the world. Subject, concepts and world are part of one interaction in which we can take some part for granted and enquire into the nature of other elements.

[21]Needs, Values, Truth, p.147.

just the marks of truth in L but marks of truth in general. So what marks of truth will this give us and how does it do it in detail. These are the marks of truth that Wiggins thinks we ought to expect.

1) Truth is a primary dimension of assessment for beliefs and for sentences that can express or report beliefs.

2) If **x** is true, then **x** will under favourable circumstances command convergence, and the best explanation of the existence of this convergence will either require the actual truth of **x** or be inconsistent with the denial of **x**.

3) For any **x**, if **x** is true then **x** has content; and if **x** has content then **x**'s truth cannot simply consist in **x**'s being itself a belief, or in **x**'s being something believed or willed or ...

4) Every true belief (every truth) is true in virtue of something.

5) If $\mathbf{x_1}$ is true and $\mathbf{x_2}$ is true, then their conjunction is true."[22]

The Tarskian equivalence relates beliefs, truth, and the meanings of utterances to content; that is to **p** in the formula. The sentences mean that **p**, their truth depends on whether or not **p**, and the descriptive anthropology ascribes beliefs about **p** to the speaker. Because the sentences have meaning we can relate the truth of those sentences to content by ascribing true beliefs about that content to speakers. For the content of a belief to be about something, the belief must be aimed at truth. There must be some way things would have to be that makes a difference to the truth of the belief. The belief must be sensitive to how things are in the environment of the speaker and interpreter, and must therefore be aimed at the truth of that environment. This gives the first mark of truth.

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[22]Needs, Values, Truth, pp. 147-8.

Since the content of a belief is something that is there in the environment of both speaker and interpreter, it is expected that there will be agreement about how things are, as expressed in the belief, and the best explanation of this agreement will be the truth of the belief. When there is a lack of agreement the initial reaction is to assume that there is misunderstanding, that the meaning component has broken down. Both interpreter and speaker depend on a common orientation towards the environment, they are working with similar conceptions of how things are, so disagreement will be taken as a sign that they have just assigned a wrong meaning to a particular sentence or class of sentences. The truth of how things are for subjects situated as they are will tend to ensure agreement about how things are. It is this common orientation towards the environment, its recognition of the way things are, that commands the convergence of true belief. This gives the second mark of truth.

The third mark claims that if something is true then it has content and, if it has content then its truth cannot just consist in its being believed or willed or something similar. Since the first mark requires that in order to be able to ascribe content to the belief, the belief must be sensitive to how things are in the environment, its truth cannot just consist of what speaker and interpreter believe or wish or desire, independently of how things are in their environment. The truth of a belief must depend on the environment itself, on what the belief is about, as understood by the speaker's and interpreter's common orientation towards that environment.

The fourth mark, that every truth is true in virtue of something, condenses the first three marks. That is, if it is a true belief, it has a content that is sensitive to something in the environment, both interpreter and speaker will tend to agree on that content because of its sensitivity to the environment, and it is in virtue of that content's sensitivity to the environment that the belief is true.

Finally, the fifth mark claims that if two beliefs are both true then their conjunction is true. If both beliefs are true, then they both have a content in which their truth consists. But if they individually have a content which is sensitive to particular elements in the environment, then their conjunction should also have a content which will be sensitive to those elements in the environment which support both of them individually. If the conjuncts are true then the environment which supports their individual truths, will be such as to support their joint truth and therefore the truth of the conjunction. There could not be circumstances which the content of two individual claims captured, and in virtue of which they were true, which were not also captured by the two claims taken together and thereby constituted the truth of their conjunction. Or, to put it another way, any claim rules out some circumstances. If both claims are true individually then neither rules out the circumstances in which the other is true, and therefore neither rules out those circumstances in which they are jointly true, therefore they are jointly true.

So in general, truth is what is aimed at by beliefs, their content aims to capture the truth about how things are in the environment of a speaker and an interpreter (the first mark). Because the content of a belief is sensitive to the common orientation that both speaker and hearer have to the environment, there will be an expectation that they will converge on the same beliefs, and that the best explanation of that convergence will be the belief's truth (the second mark). Since the truth of that situation is what the beliefs about it aim at, its truth will consist in something other than beliefs, something independent of the individuals concerned (the third mark), and will be true in virtue of its content, that is, true in virtue of whether it captures the situation it is about (the fourth mark). Finally because truths will assert some states of affairs and rule out others, because they have content sensitive to those states of affairs, those truths should be compatible with other truths since together they will assert a situation which encompasses both of them and rules out neither (the fifth mark).

Thus if I say to my son "There is a squirrel", I am aiming to convey a truth about the presence of a rodent in the vicinity (1st mark). Since we are sharing experience of this part of the world, I will expect him to be aware of the squirrel and agree with me, and the best explanation of this agreement will be that there actually is a squirrel here (2nd mark). "There is a squirrel" is true not just because we both believe it but because there is one here and the content of that sentence is about the presence of a squirrel (3rd & 4th marks). Given that "There is a squirrel" is true, then neither of us could accept as a truth any belief that ruled out the existence of squirrels here (5th mark).

These marks do not define truth, but they do point out some conditions on the role that truth plays in any discourse. They are not a theory of truth, but they do highlight some minimum requirements on a theory. These are marks of the concept true, such that if some concept of truth fails to conform to them it would be fair to ask whether it is reasonably a concept of truth, or whether it distorts the concept of truth. They are also the marks, I would suggest, that the sophisticated moral realist will use to distinguish between judgments, or claims, and their truth. That is, the truth is something a judgment aims at, a judgment has content, not merely dependent on or derivative of the beliefs of those making the judgment, in virtue of which the judgment is true or not and which would be the basis of agreement about the judgment, and if a judgment is true we will expect it to be compatible with other true judgments. These marks say nothing about whether the concepts used in judgments are absolute or relative, real or apparent, they just delineate something of what it is for judgments to be objective. They characterise truth as something that can outstrip the evidence for it, but this does not entail that only what is beyond the evidence can be true. It might be that there are truths we cannot get hold of, 'sonar texture' might be one of these, but that does not surely mean that we have not got hold of some truth merely because we have not got hold of all the truth there is. We may have some truth, even if we do not have the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So let us see how Moral Realism (MR), Moral

Constructivism (MC) and Sophisticated Moral Realism (SMR) might display these marks of truth.

Brink formulated the positions of the moral realist and the moral constructivist as follows:

MR 1)There are moral facts or truths

2)These facts or truths are independent of the evidence for them

MC 1)There are moral facts or truths

2)These facts or truths are constituted by the evidence for them[23]

To be able to formulate the sophisticated moral realist's position we need to look more closely at what the second condition is saying. Brink's realist is meant to capture the idea that the moral facts are conceptually or metaphysically independent of our minds. That is, these are facts or truths which "are metaphysically or conceptually independent of the beliefs or propositions which are our evidence that those facts obtain"[24]. His constructivist, by contrast, thinks that there can be no such facts independently of our thinking about morality; moral facts are constituted by the beliefs that are our evidence that they obtain. As a result the realist thinks that the truth of those facts is evidence-independent (they are true independently not just of what we happen to believe about them but of the ways we have of thinking about them), and the constructivist that it is evidence-dependent (the only thing that could count as their being true depends on our having or being able to have evidence). Perhaps the best way to highlight the difference between the realist and the sophisticated realist is to say that for the sophisticated realist, while the facts we discover are metaphysically independent of our beliefs (they are not brought into

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[23]Brink, p.16.
[24]Brink, p.15.

being by our beliefs or constructed out of them) they are not required to be conceptually independent (they do not need to be thinkable without using the concepts we use to think about them).[25] This means that for the sophisticated realist the truth of a fact is independent of the beliefs which are our evidence for it, but not true independent of our ways of thinking about such facts. This is something which follows from the use of the marks of truth; truth is something that constrains the beliefs we may attribute to others in an attempt to make sense of them in the light of a common orientation to a common environment, it arises in the context of the ways we think about things, not independently of that context.

This distinction will perhaps be clearer if we consider an example. For the moral realist it is possible that releasing information held on computer about someone to anyone who asks would have been wrong even for the Ancient Greeks who had no concepts of computers because they had no computers. There could be, and probably are on the realist account, moral facts for which we have no concepts and will never have concepts, but those facts exist nonetheless. The sophisticated moral realist starts from a different position. He does not start by making claims about what exists, he starts by seeing if his ways of thinking about things are constrained by truth. If they are he will conclude that there are moral facts, but because he starts with his ways of thinking about things, he will not be able, or want, to make claims about the existence or nature of anything that is independent of those ways of thinking about things, not even that there could or could not be such things. The facts he discovers will be tied to our ways of thinking about things and he will not want to make any metaphysical claims about what is independent of those ways of thinking, because he will not be in any position to do so. There may turn out to be facts that we discover because our

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[25]A similar point is made by D McNaughton in his Moral Vision, *op.cit.*, at p. 96. "If we reject the account of reality given by the absolute conception then we might say that reality is to be thought of as *perception-independent* but not as *conception-independent*. That is, what is real is thought of as there in the world, whether or not we are experiencing it, waiting to be encountered. But we need not think of what is real as being independent of our particular way of conceiving of the world."

ways of thinking change and develop in response to our situation, but the sophisticated realist should not feel compelled to claim that, because there is now a fact, if there is, about the morality of passing on computerised information, there always has been and always will be. I will say more about the relation between moral claims and what they are about later on in the chapter, but for now I would like to characterise the three moral positions as follows and consider their response to the marks of truth.

MR' 1)There are moral facts or truths
2)These facts or truths are constituted by how things are independent of human beliefs

MC' 1)There are moral facts or truths
2)These facts or truths are constituted by human beliefs independent of how things are

SMR 1)There are moral facts or truths
2)These facts or truths are constituted by how things are as understood by human beliefs

All these positions claim that there are moral facts or truths, so they would all seem display the first mark of truth. Certainly the realist and sophisticated realist would both aim at conveying truth, and accept truth as the primary dimension of assessment for beliefs. At first sight this is also the case with the constructivist, but since beliefs aim at truth because their content, what they are about, is the basis of their truth, then problems arise for the constructivist. If, as the constructivist claims, all that moral beliefs are about is other beliefs, then there would seem to be nothing beyond beliefs that those beliefs aim at. There is nothing that makes any difference to the beliefs of a social group, or of the individual subject; nothing to have a common orientation

towards which would be the basis of meaning of sentences and of ascribing beliefs to speakers. That is, there would be no truth for the constructivist, beyond any claim's relation to his considered beliefs or the beliefs of his community. His considered beliefs or the beliefs of his community would not be aiming at truth, they would have no content in Wiggins' term and, therefore, would not be beliefs, merely inventions, imagination or even noises, because they would not be saying anything.

Also, since the content of a claim, if it is determinate, by which I mean that there is some one thing it is claiming or some one situation it is sensitive to, is both what is expressed by the belief and what its truth rests on, the constructivist's claims would seem to have no such content. Either what it expresses and what its truth rests on are two different things, or even if they are the same thing, the content is still indeterminate since there is no one thing, no one set of beliefs, which the constructivist is capturing and on which the truth of his claim rests. That is, any individual constructivist may be said to be aiming at one thing, the beliefs of his community, or his own considered beliefs, but those considered beliefs, or the community's beliefs are not aiming at anything. Moreover, any two constructivists making apparently the same claims may be aiming at different sets of beliefs Now the constructivist might be quite happy to say that there was no truth as the basis of his beliefs, or inventions, but then he could not, as Brink thinks, be said to be claiming that there are facts or truths which he has access to or knowledge of. If they are truths, they must be based on more than just opinions, but if they are not or cannot be true, then they are not truths or facts.

There are differences as well, when we consider the second mark of truth. If a moral claim is true it is expected to command convergence, where the best explanation of that convergence will require the truth of the claim or the inconsistency of denial of it. This at first seems all right for the realist, since truth depends on fit with the world, and therefore one would expect that all those who are conceptualising the world

correctly will agree on the way things are because of the way things are. The realist, however, is someone who believes in the possibility of evidence-transcendent truths. There may be truths to which we may never have access, we may perhaps miss out on whole areas of the way things are because we never develop the conceptual apparatus to capture them. There would be a problem with claiming this, however, since such truths could not display the marks of truth. As we cannot conceptualise these truths we cannot give them any content or agree about them. The most the realist can be claiming here is that there could be some facts which some concepts, were we to develop them, could express. Whatever it means to call these truths, it is not anything that fits with the marks of truth. There is, however, also the possibility that we have developed conceptual apparatus to describe features of the world for which we do not or even could not have sufficient evidence. In the case of these truths presumably the realist would not expect that convergence would be commanded by the truth of the claim but by the evidence, and the best explanation of convergence would be to do with the sorts of evidence we are equipped to detect not the truth of the claim. If a claim is beyond human detecting, if the evidence cannot decide the truth of the claim, then someone making that claim is basing their claim on the evidence, and if two people agree on a claim it will be because of the evidence rather than the truth of the claim, because that can have no effect on their judgments.[26] In this case it is dubious that the content of the claim is the truth or fact that it is purportedly about. The content here is surely some function of the evidence rather than the truth. For example, a realist who believes that the pain of others is an evidence-transcendent fact may say that the content of a claim "X is in pain" is X's pain. It is not X's pain, however, that he responds to when he rushes over to ask if X is alright, since he has no access to that. It must be X's groaning or rolling around or the fact that he has

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[26]In fact an anti-realist who believes in defeasible criteria for some truths has similar problems. For an example of this position see Crispin Wright's discussions of criteria in his *Realism, Meaning and Truth*, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993). If these criteria are defeasible, then there may be convergence, but there seems no reason to claim that convergence is best explained by truth rather than the criteria, since the criteria may apply in cases where the claim is not true.

bullet wounds or some such thing. In which case it cannot be X's pain that he and others have beliefs about which causes their agreement, they must in fact have beliefs about and agree about his behaviour and other evidence. So in the case of evidence-transcendent truths the realist has no right to expect either that convergence will be commanded by the truth of a claim, or that the best explanation of convergence will be is truth.

The sophisticated realist would certainly hold that, since his truths are true of the world, truth would command convergence. In fact he holds the second mark to be partly definitive of truth, such that if something fails to conform to it, it will not be a truth. Thus the sophisticated realist does not have the problem of the realist, since the second mark excludes the possibility of evidence-transcendent truths. If there were no possible evidence for a claim, what could it be about it that would command convergence, and how could the best explanation of that convergence be the truth? If whether a claim is true or false makes no difference to people, then there can be no reasons to assent to that claim, and assenting to it cannot be best explained by its truth. If, on the other hand, the claim does, under some circumstances command convergence the best explanation of which is the truth of the claim, then there is something which makes a difference to its truth or falsity and it is not, therefore, evidence-transcendent. The sophisticated realist's problem comes at the best explanation level. If his truths can only be discovered via the beliefs of moral subjects about the world and their responses to it, can he tell whether his beliefs and responses are appropriate to the true state of the world seen from a truly moral point of view or are influenced by some other circumstances and conditions? This may equally, of course, be a problem for the moral realist, since he may not be able to tell when he, and the people he agrees with are conceiving of the world correctly, the only test he has for the justification of his beliefs may be a test for coherence. So, although both the realist and the sophisticated realist would expect the truth to command convergence, at least in the case of non-evidence-transcendent truths, they both have

problems on whether, on any occasion, the best explanation for convergence achieved is the truth or something else. The sophisticated realist has an advantage in that he holds that the truth is within reach, is available to our ways of understanding it, and therefore has a guarantee that it can be the best explanation of convergence, at least sometimes. If the realist holds that truth is or can be evidence-transcendent, then he has a problem in those cases with the truth of a situation being the best explanation for convergence. Since the truth may be beyond our grasping or conceiving, any convergence in these cases will have to be explained on other grounds.

The constructivist seems to have no problems with convergence on a particular claim made from within a particular ethical community since the convergence expected will be on the ethical views of that community. He does however have problems both about the reasons for this convergence, and with ethical communities making incompatible moral claims. The second mark claims not just that there will be agreement about a true claim, but that the best explanation of this agreement will be the truth of the claim or will be inconsistent with its denial. This cannot be the case for any form of constructivism, however, since all versions of constructivism hold that there is no truth, beyond what happen to be the beliefs of a community, for opinion to converge on. Within a community there will be convergence, but it will be convergence on a set of beliefs which are not themselves held because they are true, and therefore it is not the truth of those beliefs that is commanding convergence The explanation of convergence within a community will be something to do with cultural conditioning, education and upbringing. Even if the constructivist holds a coherence theory of truth, and holds that the community's claims are true because coherent, their coherence does not seem to be the explanation of the convergence of those claims so much as that is what the community trains its members to believe. In the case of incompatible claims from different communities convergence will not even be expected precisely because there is no truth independent of a community's beliefs to be had. There is no coherent set of beliefs that would encompass both communities

claims and therefore no standard for what would be a true claim. So the constructivist does not conform to the second mark of truth at all.

When it comes to the third mark, again the realist and the sophisticated realist have a hold on it, but the constructivist denies this one altogether. For the realist, the truth of a claim again consists in how well its content captures the facts about the world, so cannot simply consist in being a belief. Again, however, he has a problem with evidence-transcendent truths. The content of a claim in Wiggins' understanding, is meant to be something which impinges on the common orientation to an environment in which moral language is used, in terms of which moral language users can make sense of one another. If moral truths are evidence-transcendent, or may be, then they may not impinge on moral language users at all, moral language users cannot be sensitive to the content of their beliefs, and therefore those beliefs cannot be the sorts of things that are candidates for truth, because they do not have content in Wiggins terms. The sophisticated realist will also hold that the truth of a claim cannot simply be a belief, since the content of a claim is something that is as it is independently of whether we believe it or not. However, he maintains that there may be no means of assessing its truth independently of our beliefs about and responses to the world. That is not to say that the truth is constituted by those beliefs and responses but that our beliefs and responses may be the only ways we have of assessing truth claims. There can be no getting outside our interaction with the world to assess it. Again these truths cannot be evidence-transcendent because their content is the sort of thing that impinges on moral language users, the sort of thing they are sensitive to, which affects their beliefs and allows them to make sense of one another. For the constructivist, although a claim mostly cannot be just the individual's belief without any constraints on it, its truth does consist in its being a belief or a function of beliefs. The problem comes in at the level of content. The third mark says that if a belief is true then it has content and if it has content then its truth cannot consist in its being a belief. The constructivist's claims, however, either do not have a content, or have content in a

special sense yet to be defined, or perhaps the same belief has different content under different conditions. For example, the constructivist could claim that the content of an individual community member's belief that 'Abortion is wrong' could be his community's beliefs about abortion, but the community's belief that abortion is wrong could not have that same content. That is the individual could be sensitive to his community's beliefs, but the community has nothing to be sensitive to. Either way they do not have the straightforward sort of content that the realist's and sophisticated realist's beliefs do. This ensures that what the constructivist claims cannot be a truth, since it does not have content, or at least does not have content of the sort that is a candidate for truth, and is therefore not content in the terms of the third mark. So, although the realist and the sophisticated realist lay claim to the third mark, the constructivist cannot and would not want to, since he thinks that the truth of his claims consist in beliefs.

For the realist and the sophisticated realist truths are true in virtue of something, although the nature of the something would be different in each case; the way the world is independent of us, or the way the world is seen by a particular type of mind, one that sees it in moral terms. For the realist this mark does not, however, condense the first three marks. Since the realist may allow for evidence-transcendent truths, there are problems for him with how the content of his beliefs relates to what he can be sensitive to, and whether the truth of his beliefs is what commands convergence on them. So although he would hold that true beliefs are true in virtue of something this something does not play the same role in the first three marks. For the constructivist, truths would seem to be true in virtue of something, that is their coherence with the other beliefs the constructivist holds, either as an individual or as a member of his community. This mark does not, for the constructivist however, follow out of the first three marks. It is not because a belief has content, commands convergence and its truth consists in something other than beliefs, that it is true in virtue of its coherence

with other beliefs. A claim's coherence with other beliefs as a test of its truth is taken as primary, and ensures that the constructivist fails the first three marks.

The fifth mark claims that the conjunction of any two truths will be true. The realist will hold it because if they are true, a true description of the world will contain them separately and a rearrangement of that description could contain their conjunction. Should the constructivist accept the fifth mark? If he requires coherence or consistency to be a constraint on his ethical beliefs, then his beliefs will fit with each other, so that the conjunction of any true beliefs will be true If he did not require consistency or coherence of ethical beliefs then two beliefs could be contradictory and their conjunction could be an inconsistency, and therefore not true. However, if ethical beliefs are supposed to guide our ethical behaviour, contradictory beliefs would fail to provide a guide. The constructivist, therefore, has to hold coherence or consistency as a constraint on his ethical beliefs and so must adhere to the fifth mark. The sophisticated realist will hold that the world as experienced from a particular perspective will be such that a true description of it will contain both truths and the various conjunctions of those truths, and so will also accept the fifth mark.

So by using the marks of truth to assess the objectivity of moral discourse we have problems with both the realist and the constructivist. There are difficulties with the constructivist position, since if his claims are to be regarded as candidates for truth they cannot be making the same *prima facie* claims as the realist or sophisticated realist would be making using the same language, and even so he has only a limited method of distinguishing between belief systems with respect to their truth. The realist in general has problems with evidence-transcendent truths, particularly with the notion of their content, and moral language users ability to be sensitive to it with respect to the second and third marks. If the truth of moral claims is, or can be, evidence-transcendent then the realist could not expect convergence as a mark of truth and their content could not be of the sort to impinge on the common orientation to the

environment of moral language users. The sophisticated realist may, as we remarked above, have problems telling whether, when convergence on a claim is achieved, the best explanation for it is the truth of the claim or something else, or when claims are incompatible, which is true. He does not, however, have any difficulty with using the marks of truth to assess the objectivity of his claims, whereas both the realist and the constructivist will hold, because of their metaphysical position, that there are truths which are not recognisable by the marks of truth.

Another way of understanding their different responses to the marks of truth would be to bear in mind that the sophisticated realist starts from a different point of view than both the realist and the constructivist. As we saw earlier, they both start from a position about what facts are that forces a particular view of truth on them. As a result both fail to comply with the marks of truth in at least some cases. In fact both the realist and the constructivist have to reject Wiggins' whole approach. The realist must reject it because some of his truths are not recognisable by this approach. For him truths do not always make a difference to people's behaviour, they do not always explain us to one another. He holds that there are truths which do not, or even cannot impinge upon us, and therefore cannot hold that those truths would play any role in making sense of one another. The constructivist rejects it because, although it is a viable process within any community, or between an individual and his considered beliefs, it cannot work between communities or individuals. There are only truths within a community or for the individual, and so the claims they make are only truths in a limited sense. By starting from the nature of their moral facts the realist and the constructivist have ruled out the marks of truth as applying to all their truths or applying to them in all circumstances. The sophisticated realist, however, starts neither with a metaphysical view of facts or a theory of truth. He starts from the possibility of his claims being candidates for truth, uses the marks of truth to assess whether they are true, and arrives at facts from there, without having to specify the nature of his facts or a precise theory about how truth relates claims to facts. The

question is whether this is good enough or whether we have to reject the sophisticated realist point of view because it does not match up to the realists demands. I want to argue that this is not the case, and in fact that the realist position makes demands on us that cannot be met. I do not think we have to go as far as the realist would have us go to meet the demands of truth.

2.4 Is realism too demanding?

I quoted David Brink at the start as saying that scientific realism talks about "a world whose existence and nature are independent of our theorising about it." and that "scientific terms refer to real features of the world".[27] He also thinks that for the realist truth is evidence-transcendent. That is, the realist claims that the world is as it is independent of us and our beliefs about it, that facts about the world are true independently of our evidence for them, and that nonetheless our concepts manage to capture some of the features of the world. The motivation for these claims is surely that we can be mistaken about things. Past experience shows us that not only can individuals be mistaken about how things are in terms of the current understanding we have of the world, but also that our understanding in general may be mistaken. We have had ways of understanding things that we no longer believe reflect how things are; for example, beliefs about witches and magic, or that the world is flat, or that the universe revolves around the earth. This leads the realist to say that there must be a right way of describing and understanding things which we either succeed or fail in getting hold of with our ways of understanding. He may also hold that some of our ways of thinking about things say more about us and our peculiarities than they do about how things really are.

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[27]Brink, p. 7.

This all seems to fit with the first picture of us and our relationship to the world that I suggested in Chapter 1. There is a world out there, and we observe and attempt to understand it using our concepts, but our concepts may seriously distort things for us, and may even invent features of the world that do not exist. The picture of what it is to get things right here is a picture of an observer or understanding which uses concepts which do not distort or invent. That is there is a right way of understanding the world, which has all the facts right. The facts are fixed, according to this right understanding of things, and we will only be getting things right, our claims will only be true, if we conceptualise things the way the correct understanding does. That is, the correct story about the world is the world's story, it is not our story or anyone else's story, or at least it is ours only if we can tell the world's story, if our language and concepts can fortuitously match the world's language or concepts. There is a right way to describe the world that is independent of our theorising, which our theorising just happens to capture in some circumstances. This success in telling the world's story has or may have nothing to do with the sorts of evidence we have for the claims we make. We may succeed in capturing the facts but without having the evidence to support our claims, for example, when we make claims about other's pain or facts about the past. All that counts as truth then is conformity to the right way of understanding things, or being able to tell the world's story.

This concept of truth makes far stronger demands on us than the marks of truth require. In terms of Wiggins' depiction of truth, it is something that relates meaning to understanding others and the world in terms of a common orientation towards the world. Quite what it would be for the world to have its own story is something that the marks of truth cannot give any content to precisely because the notion of sharing an orientation to the world with the world and sharing its sensitivity to how things are from that orientation, to attribute beliefs to the world about itself and to explain the world's behaviour in the light of those beliefs, fail to make sense. The whole picture of approaching any area of discourse by the marks of truth cannot lead us to what the

world thinks about itself, or allow us to make any sense of the world's thinking about itself at all. So if, for the realist, conformity with the world's story is the important mark of truth, it is not clear what role this could play in our ways of thinking about things and or understanding others. This is not just an epistemological point that we could not know whether any particular claim was true or not, that can also be the case for the sophisticated realist. It is more the point that this mark of truth is not one which fits with our pre-theoretic notion of truth, with our everyday practice of understanding others and the world. The concept of truth surely arises within the context of our orientation towards, and understanding of things. We understand the idea of claims being true in terms of how things are understood by us in general, not in terms of how things might be from some inhumanly distant point of view, or rather some non-point of view. The point of the world's story is either that it is told from some all encompassing point of view, or from no point of view at all. An all encompassing point of view does not seem to be a point of view at all in that its aim is to leave all points of view behind, to remove all their distortions and come to a clear, undistorted view. But either that is a view of some sort, in which case it risks having some distortion due to its perspective, or it is no view at all, in which case it is difficult to see how to tell a story from there. To have no point of view is not to be in a position to make any claims. It sounds rather like some Buddhist notions of immersion in the unity of the world rather than having a point of view from which the world can be understood. But while Buddhists would claim that this immersion gives understanding of the world, and therefore truth, it is not an understanding that can be communicated, and its truth cannot be the concept of truth we use in making sense of others and the world in terms if what is meant by claims about them. That is, the realist's concept of a world fixed and describable in terms which we may or may not have access to, which may or may not bear any relation to the ways we have of understanding it, leads him to a concept of truth which threatens to bear no relationship at all to our ordinary understanding of what it is for claims to be true or false.

The sophisticated realist, by contrast, thinks the only story we are in a position to make any claims about and assess the truth of is our own story. That is not to say, however, that the world plays no part in our story of how things are, that our concepts do not grasp the truth because they are ours. This is not a story we have made up in isolation, it is an understanding in which the world plays a significant part in that it is what constrains what we can say in the story. This holds, for the sophisticated realist, of all our ways of conceptualising the world, not just in moral terms, and this is why he would claim that scientific claims are no more realist than moral claims. That is not to say that there are no differences between claims about, for example, primary qualities, secondary qualities and moral qualities for the sophisticated realist, but that the difference is not that some are real and claims about them are objective, whereas others are not. For the sophisticated realist the qualities are all real, as opposed to apparent, and claims about them are all objective, as opposed to subjective, they are just relative to different ways we have of understanding ourselves and our environment.

In primary quality terms the sophisticated realist would hold that primary qualities are real, but although we develop the concepts we do because of the sorts of creatures we are (oriented towards the world in visual and tactile terms), there are other ways of being oriented to a spatial environment, in sonar or radar terms for example, which will identify the same properties and relations. That is primary qualities are described by us in terms of the concepts we have developed from using particular sensory modalities, but other points of view, using other sensory modalities may develop and use the same concepts to describe the same primary qualities. What constrains the concepts we develop are primary qualities of the world (shape, position, motion etc.), and the sorts of creatures we are. The interesting thing about the primary qualities is that these are the qualities we would expect anything that we recognised as sensitive to its environment and capable of thinking about it to recognise. This is perhaps why

there is still much debate about whether and how complexly animals think about their environment, because we do recognise that they are sensitive to it in ways that are both similar to and different from ours. It is debatable, however, whether we would even consider or recognise as candidates for cognitive ability things that did not respond to the primary qualities of the world. If there were such things we might fail to recognise them at all!

In secondary quality terms, the qualities we identify are still real, although relative to a particular sensory modality, a sort of orientation, that has developed in response to an environment that is conceptualisable in those terms if the subject has the relevant sensory modality. The constraints on our concept development are secondary properties of the world (colour, taste, smell etc.), and the sorts of creatures we are. What primary and secondary qualities have in common is that they are generally speaking stable properties, by which I mean that what it is to have those properties, and what sorts of things have them is something that does not change very much if at all. For example, what it is to be circular may be a little more precise for a mathematician than for the general public, but our concept of 'circularity' has not changed over time; Euclid would probably recognise the same things as circular as a modern mathematician. Similarly, in general, our colour judgments do not change much through time, although I understand that colours such as yellow and orange are comparative latecomers to the spectrum.

The difference between primary and secondary qualities and moral qualities lies in the fact that here our concepts develop in response to a changing environment; that is an environment in which what it is to have a particular moral property may change. When we think about primary and secondary qualities we think of ourselves developing concepts to cope with a world which it is beyond our power to change. That is, our concepts develop largely because of the way the world is capable of being conceived of by creatures like us, and if we develop new concepts it is not that the

world has changed but that we have developed an ability to make discriminations that we could not make previously, not because the relevant properties did not exist, but because we could not, and perhaps had no need to, discriminate them. The moral environment, however, is not just one we find ourselves in, it is one we create. The moral qualities we find in our environment are there because of the way that environment has developed in response to social, political, physical and biological constraints, and in response to the ways we have of conceptualising it in moral terms. Our moral environment develops out of the way it already is and in response to the way we think of it, and this developing moral environment then causes us to revise our ways of thinking of it. Just as, no doubt, our conception of heat changed when we thought of it as produced by molecular motion rather than caloric, so our moral understanding and conception of slavery changed when we thought of it as the possession of fellow human beings rather than of some sub-species, and so, presumably, did our concept of what it was to be a human being. So the constraints on our concept development are the moral properties of a world that is changing and developing, at least in part, because we are moral subjects with a particular way of conceptualising that world.

In all three cases, with respect to the three types of properties, what matters for the sophisticated realist is that there is a difference between the truth of something and judgements made about it. Our environment is as we find it or even as we make it, but there is a way that it is and our judgements are aimed at the truth of the way it is. That is our judgments have content which is about the way things are, understood from our perspective (as having sensitivity to spatial, colour and moral properties), and are true or not in virtue of that content Nonetheless, the way things are cannot be inaccessible to the sorts of ways we have of thinking and talking about them, and adherence to the marks of truth does not require or even allow that truth be inaccessible to our ways of theorising about it. They allow that we may make mistaken claims, but given that the content of our claims is what determines their

truth, then the claim must be able to conceptualise that content. It cannot be the case that the content might be totally beyond the reach of our concepts, even though they might on occasion only capture it very loosely.

This is something that becomes apparent in consideration of the favourable circumstances mentioned in the second mark. These seem to be taken generally as being something to do with the individual's location relative to what he is making claims about and some description of the conditions of the environment. Thus we might say that favourable circumstances for making claims about the shape of a material object involve being close enough to see or feel it, the object being in a good light, the individual having good eyesight, not having lost his sense of touch, not being dizzy or intoxicated, and any other of a number of conditions. All these conditions seem independent of the actual beliefs about and responses to shapes of objects. Yet are they really? We might say that being close enough is a measure based on people's ability to recognise shapes of that sort, that having good eyesight or a sense of touch ultimately relies on people's responses to tests of, amongst other things, shape identification. If I am right about this, then it would seem that the favourable circumstances even for primary qualities are not describable independently of the responses to and beliefs about objects of the claimant. It seems reasonable to make the same claim about secondary qualities and moral qualities as well. However, in the case of primary qualities there does seem to be a difference. For the truth of a claim to command convergence there will be a requirement that the conditions be favourable for the sensory modalities by which the claimants can be sensitive to the claim made. In the case of primary qualities, qualities which are detectable by several modalities there may not be just one set of favourable conditions for detecting primary qualities. Foggy conditions may not be favourable for humans to make long-distance spatial judgments, but may not impede bats at all. What may be favourable conditions for a blind man to assess shape by touch, may not be for someone who has lost tactile sensitivity but assesses shape by sight. This does not mean that bats and humans,

blind or seeing, are distinguishing different properties however.[28] It may be that the truth of a claim about primary qualities will command convergence only amongst those who detect it by a particular sensory modality, under circumstances favourable for the use of that sensory modality, while still holding that the best explanation of the convergence is the truth of the claim. It is difficult to see, however, how a claim could command convergence if there was a requirement that the favourable circumstances for such convergence be described in terms independent of the type of sensory modality used to detect the properties claimed, and this seems to be the sort of requirement that the realist may be making. Primary qualities are qualities that are, we assume, recognised by other sensory modalities such as sonar and radar, but then it is not inconceivable that secondary qualities are also capable of being recognised by other sensory modalities. For example, it might be argued that Evelyn Glennie, the deaf percussionist, recognises sounds by the way she senses vibrations in different parts of her body. Thus sounds, as well as primary qualities, might be describable in different ways, but these are all relative to particular ways of conceiving the world, to responses to and beliefs about objects, and all constrained by the distinction between a claim and its truth. Is it reasonable, then, or even possible to require that the world be describable morally without reference to moral beliefs and responses. If the way the world is morally cannot be described without reference to human moral sensibilities, then moral discourse is no worse, and of course no better, off than any other discourse, and the only reasonable position to hold, with respect to any discourse, is that of the sophisticated realist!

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[28]This is not to say that something that conceptualised shape, position and motion, for example, in sonar terms, might not use different language to describe a belief about an object. The claims that were made however, would be describable in terms of human responses to and beliefs about the primary qualities of objects. That is, whatever terminology a bat used to describe a round object would be describable in human language appropriate to round objects, because the properties both the bat and we are describing are the same properties.

The argument so far has shown that the realist, if he is understood to require that the nature of the world is describable independently of any reference to human ways of conceiving of it, makes unnecessarily strong requirements on truth, and that the constructivist might, at best, have hold of a moral system which his moral claims are endorsements or descriptions of, but no overall truth against which to test them because he is not making moral claims in the same way as the realist and the sophisticated realist.. The sophisticated realist holds that there is a distinctively moral way of understanding the world and that moral discourse is accordingly regulated by truth.

Of course it might be possible, particularly since we do not have an account of any mechanism on which to base the moral way of understanding the world, to maintain that there are many different types of moral understanding, in much the same way as it might be possible to say that a person who is colour-blind does not have a defective visual system but merely a different one. This would allow us to say that, although there was only one truth against which to assess moral claims, there could nevertheless be incompatible moral claims because the people disagreeing would have different ways of understanding things in moral terms. It might therefore be that if someone seemed genuinely unable to distinguish between two moral properties we would have to think about whether they were morally blind in this respect, whether their moral understanding was defective or genuinely different. However, as in the colour case, I think the temptation is to say that if they are sensitive to the same moral properties that we are in general, then a minor deviation is a defect rather than a difference. Thus there would be no need to postulate different moral understandings as long as there was a background of general agreement with a few exceptions.

So it seems at least possible that the position of the Sophisticated Moral Realist is a coherent one. That is, it is possible that moral discourse can maintain a truth/judgement distinction for its claims even though the truth of those claims would

have to make reference to distinctively human ways of understanding the world, that is in moral terms. If this is the case then moral discourse will have patterns of use that can be analysed in order to give us information about ourselves and the moral environment we find ourselves embedded in.

Having established, therefore, that moral discourse is one that can be regulated by truth, we now need to consider whether it is so regulated, and whether there can be different truths relative to different discourses, or whether we have to maintain that there is really only one truth against which different discourses, not just different moral discourses, must be measured. There are two important questions here, whether each discourse can be regulated merely by its own standards, and if not whether the standard that regulates all discourses is truth. These will both be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Discipline, norms and truth

We have discovered that there is room for a metaphysical position where moral discourse can be regulated by truth. The question now is whether it is so regulated - whether it has what Crispin Wright, in his `*Truth and Objectivity*'[1] calls discipline, and whether that discipline is a discipline of truth or of something less than truth, such as, for example, warranted assertibility. I want to consider Wright's position because he argues that the applicability of truth to a discourse does not support a realist, or presumably even a sophisticated realist, metaphysical position. Wright claims that there will be a discipline with respect to truth in any assertoric discourse, but that the truth predicate associated with any such discourse is particular to that discourse and arises out of the norms of warranted assertibility of that discourse. Furthermore, there is no need to invoke a realist picture of a world independent of us and our thoughts about it, to maintain a concept of truth or even to have some idea of our thoughts corresponding to the way things are. The realism that Wright is denying the need for here is what he calls modest realism, that is, the view that holds that

> "the external world exists independently of us, that it is as it is independently of the conceptual vocabulary in terms of which we think about it, and that it is as it is independently of the beliefs about it which we do, will or ever would form."[pp.1-2]

His thought is that any discourse that makes assertions has a truth predicate associated with it, merely by virtue of its assertoric form and its firmly acknowledged standards of what may and may not be asserted within the discourse. The truth predicate is one that for Wright arises out of these standards of proper and improper use, what Wright calls the discourse's discipline. Since this requires no grounding in anything external

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[1]All page references in this chapter are to Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

to the discourse, no realist notion of a world the discourse is about, the standards of proper and improper use regulate assertions with respect to their relations to previous assertions. The standards are about words and their patterns of use without any need for recourse to anything else.[2] Wright talks about discipline as internal, as that to which "any genuine range of assertoric contents will be *intrinsically* subject"[p.73, footnote, emphasis added] and about "assertoric "language games", each governed by its own *internal* standards of acceptability"[p.76, emphasis added]. This discipline takes as input strings of world or symbols that have already been uttered, and constrains what strings of words or symbols can be output according to a set of rules. Of course use of the terms `word' and `symbol' suggests that they stand for something, but the discipline ignores this aspect and manipulates them in virtue of their intrinsic, internal properties. Thus they can be seen as syntactic relations between assertions (what can be said now is constrained purely by what has been said before) and I shall label this internal discipline. It is internal since it operates in terms of a system of rules about the terms of the discourse and their patterns of use which needs no reference to anything external to the discourse (such as facts or a world) to generate or constrain them. A consequence of this possibility of truth being purely a matter internal to the discourse is that the realist, or sophisticated realist, would have to provide a further argument to show a need for any reliance on the idea of an external world to give a concept of truth. What I want to argue is that Wright's picture of a truth predicate arising from wholly internal standards about what may be said in the discourse is not enough to give us anything that might be called semantic evaluation.

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[2]It should be noted that the concept of the patterns of word use that are talked about here are different in one important respect from the way this phrase is used in Chapter 1. There I was talking about analysing our language and its patterns of use to tell us something about both ourselves and the world we interact with. In that case, however, language and concepts were a part of our interaction with the world; the world, in Wright's modest sense of realism, was part of the picture and part of what regulates our patterns of use of language and concepts. The idea of words and their patterns of use that I am equating with Wright's discipline does not have the world in the picture at all. They are patterns of use in Wright's understanding of a discourse which arises solely out of standards of proper and improper use which are purely internal to the discourse.

I will consider whether Wright's concept of minimal truth is applicable in the way he thinks it is to any discourse, and whether he can maintain, as he does, that the norms of warranted assertibility are the primary norms of a discourse. If it can be shown, as I think it can be, that truth is the primary normative constraint on all but a very few discourses, and that this does not arise from the norms of warranted assertibility, then I think this will suffice to show that truth, as it applies to and constrains moral discourse cannot be a truth particular to moral discourse or different from the concept of truth as used for other discourses. That is, while warrant to assert is, on Wright's account, particular to a discourse since it arises out of that discourse's discipline, which need depend on nothing external to the discourse, the concept of a substantial truth predicate, even in a minimally true discourse, depends on some idea of how things are that is external to the discourse, and cannot therefore be something that arises out of the discourse and is applicable solely to that discourse.

3.1 Wright's Minimal Truth

What Wright claims is that any assertoric discourse will have a truth predicate associated with it. For a discourse to be assertoric it must have two features: firstly its sentences must have the grammatical form of assertions, and secondly there must be "firmly acknowledged standards of proper and improper use of the discourses ingredient sentences" [p.29] - what Wright calls discipline. The first condition is important because Wright wants to rule out from the start the idea that some discourses might not be properly assertoric, despite a particular type of surface grammar, because there is no reality for them to be about. Like the Sophisticated Realist, Wright does not want to start with a metaphysical position that makes any realist assumptions and deduce something about truth from it. He wants to start with truth, as minimal a notion of truth as possible, and see what, if any, metaphysics is

required to sustain a substantial truth predicate in a discourse.[3] To do this he needs to take claims or judgements made in the discourse at face value; thus if their surface grammar is assertoric, then they are to be taken as assertions and not disguised commendations or some such thing. Moral discourse also contains inferences where assertions are embedded in negations, conditionals and propositional attitudes, and Wright feels there cannot be any satisfactory account of such inferences and embedded claims if the discourse is seen as not properly assertoric. Another reason for the grammatical constraint is that his first approach to the truth of the sentences of the discourse is via the Disquotational Schema and therefore the discourse's sentences need to be the sorts of thing that can form the antecedent of conditional sentences, and can therefore be negated, combined with other sentences or embedded within propositional attitudes. So if "P" is a sentence of a discourse which is what Wright calls truth-apt, he takes it for granted that "it is not the case that P", "P or Q", and "S believes that P" must also be truth-apt sentences of the discourse.

The second condition, the one about discipline, is to do with the content of the sentence. It is what ensures that the sentences have *bona fide* content, and it does this by regulating what sorts of things may be said in the discourse.[4] That is, a sentence

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[3]`Substantial' for Wright is opposed to the deflationary view that to attribute truth to an assertion is to claim nothing more than is claimed by the assertion itself. For the deflationist `true' is a predicate applied at the meta-language level that has the same effect as warranted assertibility at the object-language level. For Wright, truth is a substantial property because it differs in extension from warranted assertibility, that is, something that is warrantedly assertible may not be true and we may lack a warrant to assert something that is true. This is different from Wiggins' understanding of truth as substantial, because Wiggins makes a methodological assumption that truth is substantial. That is, he wishes to start from the assumption that there is only one relevant sense of the predicate `true', truth *tout court*, and to enquire what this property is like. See for example the third postscript in his *Needs, Values, Truth*, 2nd. ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

[4]Again we may note that this differs from Wiggins' notion of content. For Wiggins a true claim's content is part of the common environment in which claimant and interpreter find themselves. The content of a true sentence is something in that common environment which both can be sensitive to. This already has some reference to something external to the discourse in question, to something that that discourse is about. For Wright the content of a claim will be something to do with

has *bona fide* content if it conforms to the rules of the discourse as applied with respect to previously used sentences. Wright claims that this disciplining can be done wholly within the terms of the discourse itself, by which he means that there are rules which regulate what may be said given the state of information we find ourselves in. Thus all that constrains the proper and improper use of the discourse's sentences is words and their patterns of use, that is, their patterns with respect to allowable syntactic relations between them. I want to talk more about information states later, but for now I will just say that if the disciplining is purely linguistic and internal, purely a matter of syntactic relations, then it seems that our state of information, the situation we find ourselves in and on the basis of which we apply the rules, is also linguistic, a matter of what sentences have already been said limiting what other sentences may be said.

Wright's conclusion, as we shall see, is that it is unnecessary to postulate a realist metaphysics, that is any external world independent of our conceptualisation and beliefs, in order to assign a truth predicate to a discourse. Unlike the Sophisticated Realist he does not think that the truth of a judgement or claim requires recourse to anything more than the discourse's standards of proper and improper use. This internal discipline is, he thinks, adequate for truth with no need for constraints external to the discourse, where external means constraints other than those imposed by words and their patterns of use. He claims, therefore, that as long as moral discourse has a grammatically assertoric form and discipline, then its judgements can be true or false, and although he acknowledges that this minimal sort of truth might not be one that many of those who argue about morals would like, nonetheless it accords with the sorts of things we say about truth and true judgements.

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what the standards of the discourse constrain us to say, which does not necessarily have any reference beyond the internal regulation of the discourse.

Given that our discourse satisfies these two conditions, surface assertoric form and discipline, Wright claims it has a truth predicate, and one that arises from their satisfaction. He says:

> "To the extent that generally acknowledged standards of *appropriateness* inform our appraisal of, for example, moral judgement and argument, the claim that moral discourse is not genuinely assertoric will seem unmotivated in contradistinction to the idea that the truth predicate which applies within it is some sort of construct from the relevant notion of appropriateness." [p.10]

This claims that the surface assertoric form and the discipline of the content together suggest that the discourse is making genuine assertions that can be true or false, and the truth predicate applicable in the discourse is one that arises out of the notion of discipline in particular: it is a construct out of what it is appropriate or inappropriate to say within the discourse. Appropriate here refers to correct syntactic relations between claims as regulated by the internal discipline of the discourse. This understanding of propriety as being about syntactic relations is important because, although Wright considers that sentences must be capable of semantic evaluation, must be truth-apt, his concept of semantic evaluation is one that arises out of internal, syntactic discipline. The above is said in the course of criticising the expressivist approach to discourses like the moral, but it seems clear that this is the idea that Wright has of a minimal truth predicate

Wright then goes on to consider what is the nature of the truth predicate the minimalist is committed to, and in particular what is its relation to the concept of warranted assertion. He starts with the idea of the Disquotational Schema and the deflationary approach to truth: that to predicate truth of something in the meta-language is to accomplish no more than does assertion in the object language, and that

the concept of truth is only needed to allow us to say something about sentences whose content is unspecified or generalised sentences - such uses as "Goldbach's conjecture is true" or "Everything he says is true". Wright thinks the Disquotational schema captures something about truth but actually says more about truth than the deflationist thinks it does. It makes the link between warranted assertibility and truth, but it also enforces a split between them. Both the link and the split are in terms of the normative force of truth and warranted assertibility. What he claims is that truth is positively normatively coincident with warranted assertibility but that it diverges from it in extension.

Wright takes the norms of the discourse to be those generated by the discipline and the concept of warranted assertibility, that is, they are to do with what we are justified (or not) in asserting within the discourse, which is how he understands the "firmly acknowledged standards of proper and improper use". There are rules which constrain what we may say within the discourse. These are not just descriptions about under what conditions we do in fact say something, they are prescriptive rules about what we should or should not say under these conditions; they provide reasons for making assertions. So the definition of the positive, normative coincidence of truth with warranted assertibility that Wright provides is that if truth and warranted assertibility are normative within the discourse (i.e. they both provide constraints on the discourse) then "reason to suppose that either characterises a move is reason to suppose that the other characterises it too." [p.18] If we have reason to think it warrantedly assertible, we have reason to think it true, and if we have reason to think it true we have reason to think it warrantedly assertible. The positive part of positive, normative coincidence is important because this leads to the split he also identifies. So, if P is true we have a reason to assert P, and if P is warrantedly assertible we similarly have a reason to assert it. It is also the case that if P is either not true or not warrantedly assertible we have reason not to assert it. The problem arises when we do not have a reason one way or another. Wright says we can see how it arises through consideration of how

the Disquotational Schema (DS) is affected with respect to negation. The Disquotational Schema is how the deflationist understands truth and can be formulated as follows.

(1) "P" is T if and only if P (DS)

T here is any truth predicate As Wright has said earlier one of the elements of assertoric discourse is that the truth-apt sentences of the discourse are such as to have a truth-apt negation. If this is the case we can substitute -P for P in (DS) to get:

(2) "-P" is T if and only if -P

But because (DS) is a biconditional we can negate both sides of (1) thus obtaining:

(3) -("P" is T) if and only if -P

and using the transitivity of the biconditional, from (2) and (3) we get what Wright calls the Negation Equivalence:

(4) "-P" is T if and only if -("P" is true) (NE)

This means that if it is not the case that "P" is T then it must be the case that the negation of "P" is T and *vice versa*. While this is right if T is read as true, it does not hold for T read as warrantedly assertible. If it is not the case that "P" is warrantedly assertible, that does not imply that its negation should be warrantedly assertible. For example, if I am in no position to assert that my husband is in his office now, since I have no evidence one way or the other, this does not give me a warrant to assert that it is not the case that he is in his office. Whereas if it is not true that he is in his office,

this does imply that it is true that it is not the case that he is in his office. I may not know one way or another, but that has no implications for the truth of the matter.

So we now have a picture of an assertoric discourse whose sentences have the grammatical form of assertions and a content which is governed by firmly acknowledged standards of proper and improper use, i.e. discipline. This discourse will have a truth predicate associated with it which is a normative constraint on the discourse, coincident with and arising out of the norms of warranted assertibility, which are themselves a result of the discipline, and yet a substantial property because it may diverge in extension from warranted assertibility.

There are, I think, several things wrong with this picture. Firstly the concept of truth that Wright has does not fit with the sort of information state he ought to be using if his discipline is to be internal to the discourse. Internal discipline only requires information about words and their patterns of use, not about the world, but this does not give us a rich enough concept of truth to diverge in extension from warranted assertibility. It also seems to cause problems for the idea of the coincidence of normativity between truth and warranted assertion. The norms of both may coincide, at least up to a point, but because Wright thinks that truth arises out of warranted assertibility he has the priority of the norms the wrong way round. If the priority were the way he thinks it is then warranted assertibility would not generate the sort of truth that can diverge in extension from it. And finally, the concept of truth that is used in generating the Negation Equivalence goes beyond and is richer than that arising out of the discipline.[5] These three points show that if Wright were to stick strictly to the

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[5]This is similar to a point made by Neil Tennant in his 'On Negation, Truth and Warranted Assertability' in *Analysis*, 55 (1995) 98-104. Tennant approaches the point from concerns about the proper construal of negation from within a constructivist position, but nevertheless concludes, as I do, that Wright is using a realist concept of truth to generate his idea that truth diverges in extension from warranted assertibility. Tennant thinks that the Negation Equivalence also holds for warranted assertibility, which is not a point I am concerned to make, since if it does then truth and warranted assertibility still do not diverge in extension.

idea that truth arises out of warranted assertibility, he would not have a rich enough concept of truth to differ in extension from warranted assertibility, that is his truth would not be as substantial as he thinks it is. If he wants to retain substantial truth, it turns out that it must be something richer than can be generated by the concept of warranted assertibility. Wright's minimal truth may be found in some limited discourses, but it is not substantial enough to sustain the divergence in extension between it and warranted assertibility, and therefore does not actually differ from warranted assertibility; it collapses into it. If, however, we find that a discourse uses and needs a divergence in extension between warranted assertibility and truth, if its claims can be assertible while failing to be true, or true while failing to be assertible, then the concept of truth does not and cannot arise out of warranted assertibility. In these discourses the priority is the other way around, warrant to assert arises from truth and claims are true because of something other than purely internal discipline.

3.2 Discipline and Information States

As we saw earlier, a basic element in Wright's concept of minimal truth is the discipline of the discourse. Discipline is what "ensures that we have *bona fide* contents"[p.140] and consists in "firmly acknowledged standards of proper and improper use of its [the discourses] ingredient sentences"[p.29]. Wright thinks that this discipline is something that relies on the resources of the discourse alone, it is something wholly internal to the discourse, since if it were not there would be a constraint on the discourse from the outside, and this would be to go beyond what the concept of minimal truth requires. This suggests that what we may or may not say within the discourse depends both on the rules of the discourse and the situation we find ourselves in. That situation, on the basis of which we apply the rules, must be purely linguistic, that is, it must consist of things that have been said before in the

discourse.[6] Since internal discipline is purely in terms of syntactic relations between the discourses sentences, words and their patterns of use, all someone who uses the discourse's sentences properly will need to know is what the rules are and what has been said before. This situation, which I take it is what Wright means by an information state, will therefore consist in an accumulation of previous assertions of relevance to the assertion being contemplated and in the light of which the rules governing what assertions can be made are applied.

This understanding of what an information state consists in is important because of the role information plays for Wright in distinguishing between truth and warranted assertibility. In commenting on the Negation Equivalence he claims it will not hold for warranted assertibility because in a neutral information state we would not be warranted either to assert P or -P, whereas we would still hold that either P or -P was true. So a state where we have insufficient information is one that makes a difference to the extension of the concepts "true" and "warrantedly assertible". Information also plays an important role in the concept of superassertibility, which is Wright's candidate for a minimal truth predicate. What distinguishes assertibility from superassertibility is that the superassertibility of a claim does not change under the impact of new information, and this is something that is also expected of truth. So we have a further use for information in that it can change the warrant to assert a claim but not the truth or superassertibility of that claim. Information then has these two roles distinguishing between truth and warranted assertibility; it can be insufficient to warrant assertion without affecting truth, and new information can affect the warrant to assert but not truth. How then does information function in a discourse with a minimal truth predicate, one whose discipline and information states are part of the discourse and do not arise from outside it?

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[6]This is the view of language as it appears in my first picture of the relation between subject and world. Here language is understood by Wright as separate from the subjects relation to an external world.

The process of language use in a discourse with a minimal truth predicate sounds rather like the playing of a game such as chess, and I would like to try and take this analogy a little further. In the case of chess, as in a discourse with a minimal truth predicate, we have a closed discourse, that is it need not, and does not, have any reference to anything outside itself, its discipline is internal to the discourse or the game. Whether you are playing chess, or talking about it, once you know the rules, what sorts of moves are allowed, what counts as winning, and what the state of play is, there is nothing more that is relevant to what you may do. A consequence of this is that chess is a perfect information game: if you know the rules and the state of play there will be no possible improvement in information. To be a perfect information game does not imply that the players have grasped all the information available, but simply that the information is in principle available to them. So any move, or any assertion about moves will be made from the point of view of full information. Thus if any move, or assertion about moves, is warranted, that warrant will not change. That is, in chess discourse we could have superassertibility; but this is because if a claim were warranted, no new information *could* come to light that would change the warrant, not that the warrant remains unchanged even in the light of new information. It also seems, however, that if a move or a claim is not warranted through lack of information, there is no truth beyond a warrant given by the rules to legislate one way or another. That is, if there is a gap or a contradiction in the rules, nothing beyond our desire to have a playable game will necessitate filling the gap or resolving the contradiction.

We have to be careful about the use of the term information here, because as I have presented it, it sounds as if chess players or commentators could never get things wrong; as if, once you know the rules and have the board in front of you, you should always make the right moves. As we know, however, even Grand masters can sometimes make the wrong moves. There would be no point in playing at all if no-

one ever did or could make mistakes. Nonetheless, although there are ways of making mistakes in chess, such that some of our reasons for making moves are defeasible, these reasons are not defeated by new information coming to light. One way of making mistakes arises from ignorance of the rules, or from relying on someone else's mistaken opinion. In both these cases, however, the standards being used are not those of chess, and therefore it is not the discipline of chess that warrants, or provides reasons for the moves. Or again, mistakes could be made through not appreciating the state of the game, having overlooked a piece *en prise*, or through an inability to calculate far enough ahead to realise the consequences of a move. These cases are not, however, cases of new information coming to light so much as of the implications of the information we have not having been realised. If a move is made because of these reasons, again it is not warranted by the internal discipline of chess, but by something less than this, or some incorrect understanding of it. Thus, either the internal discipline of chess warrants a move, or a judgement about moves, or it does not. If the reasons we had for making a move or a judgement turn out to be defeated it is because they were not, after all, in accord with the norms of chess, not that they were in accord with the norms of chess but new information has come to light that cause the norms to be reapplied in a different way. Thus in this sort of situation there does not seem to be anything that is normatively coincident with warranted assertibility but divergent in extension. There is nothing that is one way or another if the rules and information do not determine the situation.

If this is the sort of picture that Wright has of a disciplined discourse, then there is no room for the notion of truth that Wright also maintains. If there were a state of information that did not warrant one move, or assertion, over another, then there would not be any truth beyond that, no fact of the matter to be true, nothing that would be the case. Wright might want to say that a novice, or someone ignorant of chess would be warranted in making assertions on the basis of some authority, say a chess book by Botvinnik, and that although the assertions were warranted, there would still

be the question of whether they were true or not. That is, they would have a reason to make a move or an assertion, but this would be a defeasible reason, because beyond this reason there is a question of whether this move is the right move, or this assertion is correct. This is right, but it should be noted that the novice here is not warranted by the norms of chess discourse, his reasons and his warrant come from relying on Botvinnik who is not, if he is mistaken, operating with the norms of chess discourse, but perhaps with the norms of Botvinnik discourse. Or, alternatively, the novice may be operating with a poor understanding of the consequences of applying the rules of chess to his particular situation, in which case we will say that he played in a way that the rules allow, but does not lead to the result he thought it did, and his reasons for making that move are not warranted by chess discipline. So when we say that there is still a question about the truth of assertions about chess moves or games, we are really asking if the assertions are in accord with the norms of chess discourse, are they really assertions about chess, or about something else, such as Botvinnik's or our own inadequate opinions. Or again, if the reasons people have for making moves or assertions are reasons provided by the norms of chess or by something else. In the case of chess, it seems that if the norms of warranted assertibility are to be the norms of the discourse itself, then there can be no difference between warranted assertibility and truth, and if these norms are regulated by something other than the norms of chess, then the assertions made according to them are not warranted assertions of chess discourse. This distinction between people having reasons to make assertions, and the norms of the discourse providing reasons to assert is something I want to come back to later, when I discuss the relation between the normativity of truth and of warranted assertibility.

Of course chess is a game with strict rules laid down and a well understood way of playing it. There may be variations of chess, with slightly different rules, but nonetheless, even if we want to say that some of the norms of chess are based on past play and recognised good patterns, these in the end come down to being consequences

of the rules and aims of the game. What are we to say about a discourse which does not have fixed rules like this, whose discipline is a rather looser agreed pattern of use, firmly acknowledged standards of proper and improper use? There are no rules as such but there are patterns of good practice established on the basis of past usage. It is harder to think of an analogy here, perhaps it is like children playing a chasing game. Such constraints as it has are generally internal, there is no reason why there should be one set of rules rather than another, no reference is required to anything other than how they play the game. In fact there could be external constraints if some of the children were much younger than the others, rules about giving them a head start or special concessions might develop, or perhaps if one area of the playing ground was dangerous they might decide on a rule not to chase players who were too near that area. These sorts of cases apart, however, there is nothing beyond how they play the game that constrains them to have some set of playing practices rather than another. But then if this looser idea is what a minimal discourse is like, there is again no truth beyond warranted assertibility. If a situation arises where a player does not know what to do because this situation is not covered by the patterns of play then there is no right or wrong move. If the information she has is purely in terms of what other players have done in the course of the game, and this gives no guidance, there is nothing further that is the right answer, there is no truth beyond the warrant of past practice. Wright would of course claim that he is not talking about a one-off game but about a long-standing practice. Yet even in a long-standing practice, if he maintains that we need not see the practice as responding to anything external to it, the length of time the practice has existed should not make any difference. Its practice generates warrant, and information about what to do is just about past practice, so there is no concept of the right thing to do (the truth) that can make sense when the practice does not determine what to do.

This collapse of truth into warranted assertibility arises because all the constraints are internal - there is no game reality for the discourse to be about. In these games the

internal nature of the information state, the fact that any information had to be about the rules or the state of play, all of which is information about past practices and the allowable relations between them, is what rules out the possibility of any fact of the matter above and beyond that information state. If all discourses which sustain a concept of minimal truth are like this, then it does not seem to be the case that they sustain a truth predicate at all. In these discourses the information is about past assertions and the allowable syntactic relations between them and there cannot be more information available from elsewhere; what is allowable is exhausted by the internal discipline. If either of the sorts of distinction made above between truth and warranted assertion - that of truth applying in cases where there is insufficient information to warrant assertion, and of truth, unlike warrant, being something that does not change under the impact of new information - is applicable however, then it seems that the improvement in information we require is something beyond the present resources of the discourse. If the improved information state, the one that would cause us to revise our judgement, or that would support the truth rather than the warranted assertibility of the statement, is of something that was not available to us before, then it seems it cannot be something that was part of, or implicit in the knowledge of the rules and the state of play, that is, in the allowable internal relations between sentences.

The result of the above section is that we have two types of discourse. The first, call it a Minimal Discourse, is a fairly limited discourse. It is closed since it needs no reference to anything beyond itself, and if we are operating within this discourse then all the information we need is in principle available to us at once - there can be no concept of improvement of information. Since there is no reference to anything beyond the internal syntactic relations of sentences of the discourse, the internal discipline, the content of those sentences must be in some sense restatements or consequences of those rules. Of course it may be that we do not know all the rules of chess, for example, or that they are inconsistent, so that sometimes we are not sure

what we are warranted to assert. In the former case, however, any assertions we make are not operating with respect to the norms of chess discourse and any mistakes we make are not because anything about chess reality has changed but because we were mistaken about the norms of the discourse. And in the latter case, since warrant arises out of the internal discipline, there cannot be any truth of the matter to adjudicate one way or the other. The norms of a Minimal Discourse are fixed, they are not something that responds to anything else. We can change them if we like but this would only be because we choose to play a slightly different game, not because they do not fit as well as we thought they did, or because we have come to recognise finer discriminations in chess, or have recognised that we had previously been misidentifying some element of chess. There is nothing above and beyond the norms of chess that we have invented that would allow us to make a distinction between the warrantedness of any assertion and its truth. Note that in this sort of discourse the distinction between truth and warrant that Wright sees as inherent in the Disquotational Schema does not apply - there is nothing that is the case that assertions can be about - if we are not warranted to make an assertion because we are in a neutral information state, then there is nothing that is the truth of the matter.

The second type of discourse, a Non-Minimal Discourse, is one where there can be improvements in our information state. An improvement is additional information, not available before. This cannot, however, be information about the internal syntactic relations, since that was all previously available. It must, therefore, be due to something external to the discourse. It might be that the norms of the discourse need to be refined or modified, but if they do, this will be because they were found to be inadequate in some respect. They did not match up somehow with what the discourse is talking about, and therefore the discourse must be talking about something other than its own discipline; its discipline must be seen as a response to the discourse's content, to what it is about, and its content must be something richer than merely a restatement of the rules. This sort of discipline is an external discipline;

although it constrains what may be said it does so because it is responsive to something outside the discourse, the discourse's subject matter, what it is about. If this is so then there can be a distinction between truth and warranted assertion, since there will now be something that is the case, the truth of which is generating the norms of the Non-Minimal Discourse. Assertions will still be warranted or not dependent on the information state of the speaker, but there will be possible improvements in information which arise, not from within the limits of the discourse but from what is beyond the rules of the discourse, namely its content. This is what gives rise to the distinctions that Wright finds in the Disquotational Schema and therefore to the Negation Equivalence as Wright derives it.

3.3 The Negation Equivalence

Wright derives the Negation Equivalence, as I showed in section 1, from the Disquotational Schema. The Disquotational Schema is used as the prime example of a link between truth and warranted assertibility, that should allow us to move from the concept of warranted assertibility as it exists in an internally disciplined discourse, to the concept of truth. That is, it maintains that truth is a predicate applied in the meta-language that achieves no more than does simple assertion in the object-language. Yet Wright claims that, while the Disquotational Schema "gives an all but complete explanation of the truth predicate"[p.14], truth must be more substantial than this, even in a minimally true discourse, because the Disquotational Schema can be used to create the Negation Equivalence, which says something about truth which we cannot say about warranted assertibility.

I do not want to claim that substantial truth cannot be found in the Negation Equivalence, but that when Wright does so he is using a concept of truth which goes beyond the limits of either the object- or the meta-language, that is he finds it there because he has already assumed it. This is because the Disquotational Schema can be

read as relating the truth of a sentence either to what can be or is asserted in the object language, as the deflationists do, or to what is the case, as Wright sometimes wants to. What is relevant to the concept of warranted assertibility is not what is the case, but what evidence the speaker has.

If we consider the four steps of the derivation:

(1) "P" is T $\leftrightarrow$ P (DS)

(2) "-P" is T $\leftrightarrow$ -P (negating P in (1))

(3) -("P" is T) $\leftrightarrow$ -P (negating both sides of (1))

(4) "-P" is T $\leftrightarrow$ -("P" is T) (NE) (equating (2) and (3))

This derivation works because **-P** in (2) and (3) is taken to be the same. That is, it is taken to be something of which we can say that it is or is not the case. The content of a truth-apt sentence, as Wright has insisted, is something that has a truth-apt negation, but the very fact that both are truth-apt rather than just warranted already involves a more substantial notion than warrant. If the Disquotational Schema really just related truth in the meta-language to warranted assertibility in the object-language, as the deflationist wants, and as Wright is claiming to use it, then its form should be something like

(DS*) "P" is $T_m \leftrightarrow$ "P" is WA_o

Where T_m means true in the meta-language and WA_o means warrantedly assertible in the object-language. Of course the Negation Equivalence cannot be derived from (DS*) because it would require us to equate {"-P" is WA_o} with {-("P" is WA_o)} and

this is the very point Wright is denying to show the difference between truth and warranted assertibility. But surely if the Disquotational Schema is just what the deflationist says it is, if it shows that to predicate truth in the meta-language is to do no more that is accomplished by assertion in the object-language, then truth can only be predicated in the meta-language under those conditions where assertion in the object language is warranted and is therefore, by definition, no different from warranted assertibility. That is, where assertion in the object-language is not warranted, there is nothing that is the case or is not the case which can be negated to allow the Negation Equivalence to go through. There is nothing that could count as the truth of the content of the sentence; that content could not be truth-apt. So the deflationist would have to be committed to holding that if a sentence were not assertible, for example, owing to insufficient information, then it could not be true or false. Wright's derivation of the Negation Equivalence works, then, because he is already willing to allow that **P**, the content of a sentence, is truth-apt, where truth is understood as potentially larger than warranted assertibility. It is not that the Negation Equivalence demonstrates this, it is that it could not be derived if the assumption was not already present.

To put things another way, in a Minimal Discourse, the content of an assertion is a restatement or consequence of the internal discipline, since it is this discipline that ensures we have a *bona fide* content. So whatever **P** is, it is something that derives from the internal discipline of the discourse. If this is so then the only way of having a neutral information state is if the rules are inconsistent or have a gap in them. In this case there is nothing about the content or contained in the content that can settle anything not covered by the warrant given by this internal discipline; in fact there is no content since the content is a restatement of the rules and the rules say nothing here. There is nothing to be the case, nothing to be true, if neither an assertion with content **P** nor an assertion with content **-P** turns out to be warranted. If an account of the content **P** requires something more than a restatement or consequence of the rules,

if something in addition to an internal discipline, an external discipline, ensures the *bona fide* nature of the contents, then there is something contained in the content that could settle the truth of assertions not covered by the warrant given by an internal discipline. This, however, would be a Non-Minimal Discourse where neutral information states and improved information are possible, because the content is richer than anything that could be captured by internal discipline. It is about something wider than the rules and past practice, and therefore its discipline is an external discipline, it reflects what the discourse is about. In this case the discipline still tells us what to do with sentences with a particular content, or fails to do so if we have inadequate information, but the discipline cannot be purely syntactic, purely about relations between sentences, it also has to take into account what those sentences are about, and that involves the semantic regulation of those sentences, not merely a syntactic regulation.

So both the idea of truth as in any way differing from warranted assertibility and the derivation of the Negation Equivalence depend on the concept of a Non-Minimal Discourse where the discipline we have is a discipline with respect to something more than the rules and assertions of the discourse, it requires the discourse to be about something, to have a content which the rules respond to. An external discipline is the discipline it is because of the sort of content the sentences of the discourse have, whereas in a Minimal Discourse this priority is reversed and the content is the content it is because of the internal discipline the discourse has. The content here is no more than the rules and assertions that can be derived from them, so the internal discipline can be purely syntactic and there will be nothing to the content that sustains a concept of truth different from warranted assertibility. Whereas in a Non-Minimal Discourse the possibility of an assertion being true, even where neutral information imposes a lack of warrant, and the possibility of improved information affecting warrant but not truth, both require that the content of assertions is richer than a restatement of the discipline, and that the external discipline therefore is semantic not syntactic.

The Minimal Discourse seems to be what Wright wants a discourse sustaining a minimal truth predicate to be, but in fact it does not sustain anything over and above the concept of warranted assertibility. There are firmly acknowledged standards of proper and improper assertion, but there is no substantial truth predicate which shares the norms of the discourse with warranted assertibility but is divergent in extension. Thus, if moral discourse is held to sustain a substantial truth predicate, if we hold that our information with respect to a particular claim can change and bring us closer to the truth of the claim, it must be a Non-Minimal Discourse which has reference to something beyond itself. It cannot be a discourse where all that is referred to are the rules of the discourse. If its patterns of use respond to truth as opposed to merely warrant, then it must have content, it must be about something beyond the discipline of the discourse and it must require access to information about that content.

In these first two sections I have argued that a substantial concept of truth is not one that arises out of the norms of warranted assertibility. In a Minimal Discourse it is possible to have warrant, because of the relation between internal discipline and content, without there being any possibility of truth. In a Non-Minimal Discourse there can be a substantial truth predicate, but this possibility arises because the content and the discipline of the discourse are both constrained by the discourse's subject matter, something beyond the syntactic relations between the discourses sentences, and this is what makes its discipline external. In the next section I want to go further and show how, rather than truth arising from warranted assertibility, in a Non-Minimal Discourse warranted assertibility arises from truth. That is, if truth and warranted assertibility are normatively coincident yet extensionally divergent, as Wright claims they are, this is because the normativity of warrant derives from the normativity of truth and not *vice versa*. By looking at how Wright conceives of norms and the normative coincidence of truth and warranted assertibility, I hope to show that in a discourse to which a substantial truth predicate can be applied, it is truth that is

the primary norm of the discourse and warranted assertibility is normative, if it is, only because truth is.

3.4 Norms

What are norms for Wright, and what is normative coincidence? He distinguishes between descriptive and prescriptive norms and positive and negative norms and looks at what characteristics make a move a descriptive or a prescriptive norm. He says of positive norms:

> "A characteristic of moves in a particular practice is a descriptive norm if, as a matter of fact, participants in the practice are positively guided in their selection of moves by whether a proposed move possesses that characteristic." and "By contrast, a characteristic of moves supplies a prescriptive norm just in case the reflection that a move has that characteristic provides a (defeasible) reason for making, or endorsing, or permitting it, even if such reasons tend, for the most part, to go unacknowledged by actual participants."[p.15]

And of negative norms:

> "negative descriptive norms would be, correspondingly, characteristics such that participants in a practice treat a move's having such a characteristic as a reason for avoiding, condemning, discouraging or prohibiting it. And negative prescriptive norms would be characteristics recognition of which ought to provide reason for such negative responses to actual or proposed moves."[p.15]

The first pair of quotes suggests that the difference between descriptive and prescriptive norms is whether the characteristic provides a reason for making the move, and the second that the difference is between whether the move *ought* to be made or not. I take it then that descriptive norms are characteristics which moves made by participants in the practice actually have, and prescriptive norms are characteristics which provide reasons why participants in the practice ought to make those moves. This is borne out by a later quote:

> "[the norm's] being observed (if it is a descriptive norm) or its supplying a defeasible reason for the making, refusal and so on of moves (if it is a prescriptive norm) . . ."[p.16]

Both truth and warranted assertibility are understood as prescriptively normative of a discourse that sustains a minimal truth predicate, so both must be characteristics of moves made by participants in the discourse which provide reasons why speakers ought to make assertions. This is confusing since Wright is here talking about the norms as characteristics of moves, and truth does not seem to be the sort of thing that characterises the act of asserting so much as the assertion made. Later he says that a complex of norms of warranted assertibility operate in the discourse because "to have reason to think that a sentence is warrantedly assertible is, trivially, to have (defeasible) reason to assert it, or endorse its assertion"[p.17]. It follows from this that norms of truth apply because "any reason to think that a sentence is T may be transferred across the biconditional, into reason to make or allow the assertoric move which it expresses"[p.17] The first quotation suggests that it is the status of the sentence which warrants its assertion, rather than the status of the act of assertion itself. It is the warranted assertibility of the sentence (or its truth) that endorses its assertion. Yet on Wright's account the warranted assertibility of a sentence is surely only a property the sentence has because the act of asserting is warranted; that is why the two are trivially equated. The second must surely be wrong since it is not the

reasons we have for thinking something is true that may be transferred across the biconditional, especially as Wright insists that they are defeasible reasons, but only the characteristic of being true.

If the normativity depends on the characteristics of the sentences rather than the moves, then we can say that the truth of a sentence, or the warranted assertibility of the sentence is what endorses its assertion. So prescriptive norms of a discourse should, on this account, be characteristics of the sentences of the discourse which provide reasons why participants in the discourse ought to utter those sentences. Now truth, as a characteristic of sentences, is what Wright calls a stable characteristic, it does not change under the impact of new information, and therefore the reasons it provides must surely be non-defeasible reasons. Warranted assertibility may be a characteristic of a sentence, but it is a characteristic that the sentence has only derivatively because the act of asserting is warranted. It is not stable, because it may change under the impact of new information, at least in a Non-Minimal Discourse, so it will provide defeasible reasons, and what defeats them is new information which arises from the situation the sentence is about. Or, to put it another way, what defeats the warranted assertibility of a sentence is its truth. So if normativity of a discourse depends on characteristics of the sentences of the discourse, then truth is the normative constraint that matters.

If, on the other hand, what the norms operate on in the discourse are moves, then truth cannot be a norm of the discourse, because truth cannot be predicated of the act of asserting. An assertion can be true but asserting is not the sort of thing that can be a truth bearer. Someone may be right in asserting something because what he asserts is true, but his asserting it is not true. If what is regulated therefore is the move of asserting, then only warrant can act as a norm, and if warrant provides defeasible reasons for asserting it is hard to see what defeats them. If it is only further warrants, then presumably the reasons are not always defeasible, if they are then the truth of

what the assertions are about has come back into the picture as what defeats the reasons. Then, however, we are back to a Non-Minimal discourse where the discipline is external, it responds to the content of the discourse and arises out of truth. Thus although warrant and discipline applied to the moves or acts of asserting may be the only way we could approach the truth of assertions, nonetheless, the truth of assertions is what is constraining the discipline of warrant and the discipline is an external discipline. The discipline is the discipline it is because of the truth of the subject matter of the discourse. So whether we take the normative constraints of the discourse to be characteristics of the discourses sentences or of its moves, the bottom line is truth. Either truth is the characteristic of sentences that provides reasons why those sentences ought to be uttered, or truth is what constrains the discipline which is normative of the moves or acts of asserting.

Normative coincidence also concerns reasons. Here Wright says that a definition of the normative coincidence of truth and warranted assertibility is that "reason to suppose that either predicate characterises a move is reason to suppose that the other characterises it too"[p.18]. Here again the predicate is seen as characterising a move, which is something truth cannot do while warranted assertibility can. I think that there are problems here because there is confusion over both what is meant by assertion and by how truth and warranted assertibility can be predicated of assertions.

The first problem is that assertion is being taken to mean both the sentence, which is an assertion because of its grammatical form, and to mean the act of asserting. The second is that the two properties, truth and warranted assertibility, do not both apply to assertions in the same sense. Truth is predicable of assertions in the first sense, a property of sentences which they do not lose, and which has nothing to do with the information state of the speaker; it can be true whether they know it or not. Warrant is a property of assertions in the second sense, a property of the act of asserting. It is a relational property between the sentence and the speaker in a particular information

state and therefore something that can change in applicability to sentences of a discourse as the information state changes. A sentence will be true because of what it says is the case, but an act of asserting will be warranted both because of what the sentence asserted says is the case and because of the information the speaker has relating to that state of affairs. If the act of asserting is warranted then the sentence is warrantedly assertible and not *vice versa*, the sentence has that characteristic because the act of asserting is warranted.

So in both cases, that of defining norms and of normative coincidence, Wright is laying emphasis on the act of asserting and the warrantedness or otherwise of that, and saying that since truth is linked to warranted assertibility via the Disquotational Schema, that truth must be normative in the same way. Yet truth cannot act normatively in this way since truth cannot be predicated of the act of asserting but only of assertions in the sense of sentences. Here again the arguments used above will apply. If we understand the normativity of the discourse as based on characteristics, not of the moves of the discourse, but of the ingredient sentences then the normative force of both truth and warranted assertion will be that if either is a characteristic of a sentence, that will provide a reason why a speaker ought to assert that sentence; and warrant will be only derivatively normatively coincident with truth. Truth will be the normative constraint on the discourse and warrant will coincide with it since sentences are warranted ultimately because they are true. If, however, we understand the normativity of the discourse to be based on characteristics of the acts of assertion, then in the case of Minimal Discourses truth and warrant coincide both in normative force and in extension, or in the case of Non-Minimal Discourses they coincide in normative force and differ in extension because it is truth that constrains the discipline that provides warrant.

There is also a problem concerning reasons as they are used in talking about norms and normative coincidence. I think that Wright is equating two notions of reason

here: the notion of norms *providing a reason* to assert sentences (justifying the assertion), and the notion of *having reasons* to suppose them true or warrantedly assertible (the requirement of evidence).[7] Thus normativity is the provision of reasons to assert (if a sentence is true or warrantedly assertible then we are justified in asserting the sentence) but says nothing about how we know the sentence is true or the move warranted, it is just that if either is the case then we have a reason to assert it. Or to put it another way, the truth or warranted assertibility of a sentence just is a reason to assert it, it does not provide any other reason, and this, at least in the case of truth, is not a defeasible reason. On the other hand, when Wright talks about a reason to suppose a sentence true or warrantedly assertible, he is talking about whether we have evidence in favour of it. And, of course, a sentence can only be warrantedly assertible if asserting the sentence is warranted by having the right sort of information. The truth and the warranted assertibility of a sentence are both a reason to assert the sentence, they both act as positive prescriptive norms, but this is not a defeasible reason. It just is the case that if the sentence is true we may assert it, and if it is warrantedly assertible we may assert it. The further question of how we may know that the sentence is true or warrantedly assertible is a different one and clearly here we can have defeasible reasons. We may have a reason to assert a sentence, but if we acquire more information we will then say that while we were warranted to assert the

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[7]These two types of reason can be equated with the concept of external and internal reasons as it is used by Bernard Williams in his *Internal and External Reasons* in R. Harrison ed., Rational Action: Studies in Philosophy and Social Science (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). There is a difference, however, in that what makes a reason an internal or external one is an epistemic difference. That is, for someone making an assertion, his internal reason to do so depends on the information he has, whereas saying that the truth of an assertion provides an external reason to assert is something that may be beyond the information available, at least at that time, to that person. This distinction between internal and external reasons would not then be subject to Williams' criticism because it requires no change of motivation for someone to see that the external reason is a reason, but only a change of information. If, as Wright's platitudes about truth claim, to assert is to present as true, then truth must be the motivation for assertion, and thus the truth of a claim will be an external reason for asserting which requires no change in motivation.

sentence earlier, it was not true. The reason was a defeasible reason for thinking the sentence true, though not for thinking it warrantedly assertible.

This distinction between having a reason to assert and the discipline providing a reason to assert was something I noted earlier in my account of a Minimal Discourse. Here the internal discipline does provide a reason to assert (a justifying reason) because it is the only constraint on sentences. If a sentence is warranted at all it is warranted by the internal discipline. If we have a reason to assert it (the evidence requirement) which is not in accord with the discipline, either because we have an incomplete knowledge of the discipline, or because we have failed to notice some of its consequences, this is not in fact a defeasible reason provided by the discipline of the discourse but a reason provided by something else, and our assertion is not warranted by the discourse's internal discipline at all.

Whereas in a Non-Minimal Discourse, because we have a notion of substantial truth, truth which may differ in extension from warrant, the discipline of the discourse, here an external discipline, may warrant us in an assertion which fails to capture the truth either because the information state we are in, or the discipline itself, is not sufficiently sensitive to the truth of the situation that the assertion is about. Reasons for asserting may be defeasible because either our information or the discipline itself does not match up to the situation the assertion is about. That is the truth of the sentence is a reason to assert it (justifies assertion), while the discipline of the discourse together with our information state warrants the act of asserting (we have reason to assert). It may be that the discipline is the only way we have to approach true assertions, but the point here is that the distinction between truth and warrant requires an information state that includes more than just the rules and a discipline that is constrained by the discourse's subject matter, it includes a recognition of the situation the assertion is about. The external discipline we apply to the act of asserting is, in a Non-Minimal Discourse, based on the recognition of the situation; in

particular cases we apply the discipline differently. Thus the discipline in a Non-Minimal Discourse is something that needs to respond to something, to the types of situation that the discourse is about, as opposed to a Minimal Discourse where the discipline need respond to nothing.

So, when we are considering the normative force of truth and warranted assertibility we have two different sorts of norms. The truth of an assertion is a norm that justifies assertion, it is a property of the sentence that does not change and is therefore a non-defeasible reason to assert the sentence. Whereas warranted assertibility is something that acts as a constraint on the act of asserting. Warrant is a property of the act which changes as the information changes. If the act of asserting is warranted, then the sentence would be warrantedly assertible, but the sentence only acquires this property as a result of the act being warranted, and the sentence can lose the property if the act is no longer warranted. So warranted assertibility is not a stable property of sentences, but only of acts of assertion given particular information states. An act is warranted given the reasons we have for asserting it, but these are defeasible reasons, and what defeats them in the end, if anything does, is truth. In a Non-Minimal Discourse both these norms operate, but truth is the normative force of the discourse, it is truth as a stable property of sentences that justifies their assertion, whereas warrant is normative of the act of asserting based on evidence and reasons which are defeasible. Truth is what makes the discipline the discipline it is, and so warrant is secondary to truth. In a Minimal Discourse truth disappears as a norm, or perhaps warrant and truth are indistinguishable both in normative force and extension. Here substantial truth is not a possible property of sentences, warranted assertibility is the most they can have and they have it as a result of the warrantedness of the act of asserting. Warrant here makes the discipline the discipline it is, but the reasons provided by the warrant are no longer defeasible if they are in accord with the discipline. Here defeasible reasons are ones that do not arise out of the discipline, but from some other source.

Wright's understanding of the links between warrant and truth are illustrated in the following quote:

> "Suppose F and G are so related that, while the only kind of reason we can have for supposing that something is G is that it be F, the reason supplied is a defeasible reason. Then having reason to think that an item is G will involve having reason to think that it is F; and having reason to think it is F will amount, when so far undefeated, to reason to think it is G. Hence if either predicate is normative with respect to some practice, the two predicates will be normatively coincident with respect to it."[p.19]

Thus, having reason to think an assertion is true will involve having reason to think that it is warrantedly assertible, and having reason to think it is warrantedly assertible will amount, when so far undefeated, to reason to think it is true. The warranted assertibility of a sentence is, by definition, something we must have evidence for, and is all the evidence we can get for the truth of the sentence.

The last sentence of the quotation concludes that the two predicates are normatively coincident on the basis that there is only one set of reasons we can have, although they do duty for both predicates, therefore "reason to suppose that either predicate characterises a move is reason to suppose that the other characterises it too" [p.18] This is Wright's definition of normative coincidence, but it seems a peculiar way of defining it. It sounds as if we must have a reason, or that there must be reason, to suppose that the norms coincide if they are to coincide. But shouldn't it be the case that if the norms coincide, they don't do so just because we have reason to think that they do. Would it not be more correct, if talking from the point of view of the discourse to say that the norms coincide if whenever a sentence's being true endorses its assertion its being warrantedly assertible also endorses its assertion, and *vice*

versa? It may be that we cannot know in any given case whether a sentence is true, but only whether it is warrantedly assertible, but does this affect the coincidence of normativity?

This leads to a way of looking at things which makes truth the primary normative force on the discourse and warranted assertibility only a secondary norm. That is, truth is a property of a sentence of the discourse which provides a reason to assert it, whereas warrant is a property of a sentence and a speaker which gives that speaker a reason to assert it. Warranted assertibility is only predicated of a sentence because warrant can be predicated of the act of asserting. Warrant is a norm of the use of the discourse and warranted assertibility only derivatively a norm of the discourse, whereas truth is a primary norm of the discourse. If, however, Wright would argue that normative constraints on the use of the discourse are the only ones we could have, there is still a case to be made for truth as the primary constraint on the discourse. If truth is a substantial property and can differ from warranted assertibility in extension, then it is truth that in the end constrains the discipline the discourse has. As a Non-Minimal Discourse its discipline is external and constrained by truth.

This view is supported by considerations from the previous sections where we saw that in a discourse which sustains a truth predicate, a Non-Minimal Discourse, there must be the possibility of imperfect information. In an imperfect information state acts of assertion may or may not be warranted although the assertion concerned is held to be true or untrue. Since the information may be imperfect there can be improvements in our information state, and as long as they are improvements the information acquired will be information about the truth of an assertion, about what is the case. Of course we may mistakenly regard some information as relevant to the truth of an assertion even when it is not so and thus be lead away from the truth. Having only come across pasta near the vegetable section of Sainsbury's I may assert that it is a vegetable and regard David Dimbleby's April 1st report on the spaghetti

harvest as supporting my assertion to this effect. I am, however, still wrong in my assertion, although perhaps warranted, and an improved information state, perhaps based on the ingredients list on the packet of spaghetti, will be information relevant to the truth of my assertion. Thus it seems that the normative force of truth has priority over the normative force of warranted assertibility. The warranted assertibility of a sentence is not really a reason for justifying an assertion, it is a result of already having that justification, which is itself based on a defeasible reason, whereas the truth of the sentence is a reason, and an indefeasible reason, for justifying the assertion. I therefore find it difficult to maintain that truth and warranted assertibility coincide even in positive normative force, since reason to suppose that warranted assertibility characterises a move is not necessarily reason to suppose that truth characterises it, even if truth could characterise moves. The very fact that an assertion, not an act of asserting, may be warranted although untrue, or may not be warranted although either true or untrue, suggests that its truth-characteristic mandates different moves, even though we may not know that it does, from its warrant or lack of warrant.

The difference between a Minimal Discourse and a Non-Minimal Discourse is in the normative basis of the discourse. I would argue that in a Non-Minimal Discourse discipline, the concept of standards of proper and improper use of sentences, is an external discipline, a discipline with respect to truth not to warrant; it provides warrant not responds to it. In Minimal Discourse warrant is normative and thus, if the wrong information is used we are not operating with the norms of the discourse and there is nothing beyond being warranted that the internal discipline of the discourse has recourse to. In a Non-Minimal Discourse truth is the norm and therefore if the wrong information is used we may be warranted, but the norms of warranted assertibility may not coincide with the norms of truth because the discourse's external discipline is not sufficiently sensitive to the demands of truth, or the information state is not sufficiently sensitive to the truth of the particular situation concerned.

So, in a discourse where truth applies, it is truth that is the primary normative force. Truth here is not something relative to the discourse, or even the type of discourse, but something that is stronger than any warrant to assert mandated by the rules of the discourse. Truth is what constrains the discourse and any rules about warrant to assert arise because of the response of the discourse to truth. As truth is independent in this way of the rules of a discourse, the rules are the rules they are because of what the truth is not *vice versa*, there seem to be no grounds for suggesting that truth is different in different discourses and every reason to hold that the same truth is what constrains any discourse that makes claims to truth as distinct from warrant.

I have shown, therefore, that truth cannot be ruled out as inapplicable to moral discourse from the start. It is possible to hold a meta-ethical position, that of Sophisticated Moral Realist, which claims that moral discourse is an objective discourse, its claims are candidates for truth, a discourse about real properties of the world which are nonetheless relative to a particular human way of understanding the world, that is in moral terms. The fact that we have no account of the mechanism of moral sensibility and cannot measure moral properties is no grounds for denying objectivity to moral discourse. That is not to claim that there might not be accounts that would be problematic, but just that the fact that we do not at present understand how moral sensibility works, or even if there is any such thing as moral sensibility as opposed to an ability to recognise moral properties and relations as we recognise any other types of properties and relations in everyday perception, should not be a problem. In fact, if someone were to come up with an account of how moral sensibility worked, it would surely, to count as an explanation at all, have to take into account and explain our moral practices, so it seems unlikely that such an account would pose a problem for the objectivity of moral discourse, if this is something that constrains our moral claims and so forms a part of our moral practices. Further, if we maintain, as we seem to, a distinction between truth and mere opinion or judgement, if we hold that people can be wrong or mistaken in their moral claims, then it seems that

truth is applicable to moral discourse, and that it therefore ought to operate as the discourse's primary normative force. This gives us grounds for looking at the patterns of use, governed by truth, not patterns of word play but patterns governed by external discipline, that we find in moral discourse and using them to discover things about ourselves and our embedding in our moral environment, which will be the work of the following chapters.

Chapter 4: Moral situations and the nature of actions

We have seen that moral discourse cannot be ruled out *a priori* on the grounds that it is a discourse to which truth does not apply. That is, it is not subjective merely because it understands the world from a particular point of view, and the way the world is from that point of view cannot be described without reference to the beliefs about and responses to the world that that way of understanding it gives rise to. Considerations of truth and objectivity with respect to a particular discourse have shown us that, if a discourse has a substantial truth predicate, that is, it is an objective, Non-Minimal discourse, then the discipline of that discourse must be external. That is, it requires access to information from beyond the resources of the discourse itself and, as a discipline, responds to the sorts of situations the discourse is about. So for there to be a distinction between judgments or claims made within the discourse and the truth of those judgments or claims, the content of the discourse, what it is about, must be taken into account. The restrictions on our use of the discourse, the standards of proper and improper use of the discourse, arise not just from internal rules we have developed for that discourse, but from the discourse's subject matter. In fact, if the discourse is objective, then the rules that develop for that discourse will be ones that are sensitive to the truth of the discourse's subject matter, and the content of sentences expressing beliefs about that subject matter will also be sensitive to truth.

So is moral discourse the sort of discourse that is minimally true, whose only norms are those of warranted assertion, a Minimal discourse, or is it one where we make distinctions between judgments and their truth, a Non-Minimal discourse? If it is the latter then we must maintain, in making moral judgments, that there is a difference between truth and warranted assertibility. And here we must bear in mind a distinction between the two elements involved in making, either a judgment or a decision to act in some way; that is, between the situation on the basis of which we judge or act, and the discipline of a discourse or practice, which tell us what to judge

or how to act in this situation. The difference between a judgment and its truth can have its roots in either of these two different elements. We can be wrong about the situation on the basis of which we make our judgment, the situation which the concept of substantial truth requires our judgments to respond to. Or we can be wrong about what to do or to judge in the situation in one of two ways. The first is by a failure on the part of the individual to discern what the discipline says we should do in such situations (something akin to an incomplete or incorrect knowledge of the rules of a game), and the second is in the discourse's having developed a discipline for situations that is not sufficiently sensitive to the truth of those sorts of situation. That is we can be mistaken by misidentifying an A-type situation as a B-type situation, and thus making the wrong decisions or judgments based on what the discipline says we should do in B-type situations; or we can be mistaken in that when we do correctly identify A-type situations we do not apply the correct discipline either because we are ignorant of it or because the discourse has not developed it. For example, I may take as my moral discipline the Ten Commandments. Now I could mistakenly condemn someone for committing adultery when they were in fact married, I could mistakenly condemn them for adultery because my copy of the Bible had missed a `not' out of the relevant verse, or it could be that the Ten Commandments assumes that the only options are monogamy or adultery and therefore is insufficiently sensitive to situations, such as this one, that allow legitimate polygamous relations, for example. Thus in a Minimal discourse, since there is nothing other than the discourse for claims to be about, there is no substantial truth and warrant, as a norm, has no need to be sensitive to anything apart from the discourse's discipline, which has nothing it is required to be sensitive to, except perhaps tradition. If the discourse is objective and Non-Minimal, the difference between truth and warranted assertibility requires two things. Firstly that the objectivity of the judgment or decision rests on information about and available from the situation we are judging or acting on, that there is a possibility that our information state will change and our judgments and actions will respond to this change, and that, even if we do not have sufficient information to judge or act at

present, there may be a fact of the matter which is the correct basis of our decisions or judgments. Secondly objectivity of the discourse requires that the rules of the discourse have developed in response to the sorts of situation the discourse is about, and are sensitive to changes in those types of situation. I now propose to look at moral discourse and our common moral practices to see which of these models, a Minimal or a Non-Minimal discourse, gives a better picture of what we do.

When we consider the making of moral judgments we certainly appear to think that the situation we are in is important, and that improvement of information about that situation is possible.[1] We do not think that all we need to do in the case of moral judgments is to look more closely at moral rules and at what we or others have said about morality, we also need to know as much as we can about the situation being judged. The details of how things are in a particular case affect the judgments and decisions we make: we try to recognize similarities and differences between situations as a basis for judgments. Both the similarities and difference are in what the discourse is about, the particular situations under consideration, and not merely different systems of rules. In fact, if morality consisted in the application of rules then knowledge of the situation is the only basis on which we can decide which rules to apply in this case. Whereas if a more general notion of discipline, one perhaps not capturable in rules, is what is needed then knowing how the discipline applies will depend on the nature of the situation; if the situation is of one sort then there is one sort of answer to the question about what to do, and in another situation a different

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[1]This is not just the case in considering our general moral practice. Nearly all normative ethical theories think this is important. Aristotle says that attaining the mean is doing the right thing to the right person at the right time in the right way etc., suggesting that recognition of the situation the agent is in is vital. Consequentialist theories would surely require that recognition of the situation is essential to calculating the consequences of acting in that situation. Deontological theories will need to recognise the situation to know which rules to apply, and in Kant we arrive at a decision based on the situation we are in which then needs formulating as a rule and testing for conformity with the Categorical Imperative. Situation ethics and particularist theories will, by their very nature require us to recognise the situation to know what will be a reason for action in it.

sort of answer will be appropriate. So, for example, if we see someone attacked in the street then what we should do according to the discipline of moral discourse is different from what would be the case if we were watching street theatre simulating an attack; we would help in the former case, and not in the latter. So in distinguishing in moral discourse between a judgment and its truth we are required to take into account the situation in the context of which the judgment is being made. We need to use information from the situations moral discourse talks about to make moral judgments or decisions, and this is information that can change, thus changing our judgments or decisions; we can discover that this is street theatre, not a real attack. Moreover, if we have only just walked onto the scene and do not have enough information about the situation to know whether it is a genuine attack or not, the situation is not on that account indeterminate. It either is or is not a genuine attack, and improved information can change our judgments about it. Of course some situations may not be determinate. It could be that two actors are at odds with each other and use the street theatre to work off their aggression. Here it may not be clear whether what is going on is street theatre or a fight. Nevertheless, what is going on depends on the situation and not on what observers think about it. Even if the information cannot be improved, the situation may be determinate. Think of whether a defendant in a criminal case is considered to be neither guilty nor innocent because a piece of vital evidence has been lost and the information can no longer be recovered. The law may require that he be found innocent, but we still consider that there is a fact of the matter as to whether he committed the crime or not, even if it can no longer be demonstrated one way or another. So in all cases of moral judgment or decision-making, what is important is the situation we are judging or making a decision about, not just how things look to us or what a set of rules developed independently of such situations say we should do.

So our moral practices do require the making of judgments and decisions that are sensitive to information, which is capable of improvement, from the situation the judgment or decision is about. That situation may be a determinate one whether or

not we have decisive information about it, but whether it is or not, it is what gives rise to the information on which the objectivity of our judgments and decisions rests, and that information is what determines decisions and judgments we make about the situation and helps determine the discipline of moral discourse. The discipline we develop in the case of moral discourse is an external discipline that is sensitive to the situations that moral discourse is concerned with. The objectivity of the discourse requires that the norms of that discourse are the norms of truth. That is, that the discipline we develop, the constraints within the discourse on the proper and improper use of the discourse's sentences, will be ones that are sensitive to the truth of the sorts of situation that the discourse talks about, that they too will change to respond to changes in the sorts of situation the discourse is about.

In the criminal case it is clear that if and when the situation is known, the rules to be applied will depend on the criminal's guilt or innocence. If he was in the bank threatening people with a shotgun when it was robbed, then he was guilty and should receive the appropriate punishment. In other cases, however, for example a custody case in a divorce, our practices suggest that even if we could know all there is to be known about the situation, the rules we have may be inadequate or may conflict with one another. We may not have adequately worked out what to do in such situations, we may need to develop new and more responsive rules for new or changing situations. Still this does not necessitate claiming that there is no right decision in this case, merely that we have not found it. It may be that we give up before finding the right decision, because of a lack of time, or money, or interest, but that is not to say there is not an objective judgment to be made, but merely that we do not know or have not found out what it is. I will postpone discussion of the normativity of the rules and their sensitivity to the types of moral situation we discover for the moment and concentrate on discussing the situations with which moral discourse is concerned.

4.1 Moral Situations

In maintaining this objectivity of moral discourse and that it rests on the recognition of underlying situations, we need to be clear about what counts as a situation, about what it is that we need to be able to identify or recognise. Both the practical side of deciding what to do in any situation, and the theoretical side of making moral judgments require identification of the situation, and I want to consider moral situations from the point of view of both activities to see if they can throw any light on the nature of moral situations.

The first point I want to make is that in both types of activity, the making of moral decisions and judgments, what we consider and pass judgment on is actions. Moral decisions concern actions, they are about what the agent should or should not do in a particular situation. However, we do not need to, and I think cannot, think of actions as something independent of agents. As we shall see below, part of what it is to identify an action takes into account the agent. Moral judgments may cover a wider field than just judgments about actions; we make moral judgments about people, institutions, laws, constitutions or theories as well as actions. I would argue, however, that such things are judged the way they are because of the actions the people or institutions perform and the actions the laws, constitutions or theories allow. Thus what moral discourse talks about is actions, and the judgments or decisions it makes depends on the situations in which those actions could or do take place. If moral judgments and decisions are to be objective then we need to be able to think and talk about actions, and I want to argue that in order to do this we also need to be able to identify objectively the situations in which these actions may or do occur. This may be only a part of what we need to identify, the judgment or decision will also require that we know what to do in such situations, but that is a matter of the objectivity of the discipline of moral discourse, which I said would be postponed until later. To help us think about those situations and what we consider important about them in decision-

making and judgment, I would like to look at a few examples. Then I want to consider some restrictions on thinking about material objects that Gareth Evans produces in his `*The Varieties of Reference*'[2], and their possible applicability to thoughts about actions.

My first example is the story of the Good Samaritan. Here we have someone, a Jew, who has been attacked and robbed and is in need of help. The Samaritan, in deciding what to do, understands the problem in terms of two factors: his relationship to the victim, and what he ought to do as a result of that relationship. He could have judged that as the victim was a Jew, and Jews and Samaritans were mutually antagonistic, there was nothing he need do as a result of that relationship. Or he could, as he presumably did, judge that here was a fellow human in need of help, and that as a human he should help the victim. In both judgments there are two elements; there is recognising one's situation in a moral environment, one's relations to others in that environment, and there is deciding what to do in that situation. That is, the situation that we need to recognise as a basis for moral decision-making or judgments is a situation structured by the relationships between the participants. I will try to show in the second half of this chapter how the structure of relationships in moral situations is analogous to the structure of causal relations in the physical situations that are the basis for judgments about material objects. But for now it should suffice to show that this structure of relationships is part of what we need to know, and that we also need to know how to respond to that structure of relationships in action. These two elements need to be kept distinct since, I believe, that it is here that many apparent problems with relativism in moral discourse arise.

It might, for example, be tempting to say that what I am calling the situation is not independent in the way I suggest from what we might do about it. Perhaps, in the case

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[2]G. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. J McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

of the Good Samaritan, we do not have two people who find themselves in the same vicinity, one of whom has been attacked and needs help, perhaps what we have is a situation perceived as one where the Good Samaritan ought, or ought not, to help the Jew, and someone who does not see it like that will see a different situation. There are two reasons why I want to resist this temptation. The first is that if what ought to be done is part of the situation in this way, as opposed to distinct from it, then there seems to be no basis for moral debate. Any two people who attempted to debate the question would seem to be in danger of having no common ground from which to approach this debate.[3] The second reason is that this view appears to allow no room for development or change of moral views. We would appear to have no way of saying that some approach was a better or worse approach to a particular type of situation, because the approach itself would be part of the situation. I think, therefore, that it is more helpful to think of the situation in which we decide what to do as something distinct from that decision; that we can recognise certain relationships between the elements of a situation and that we decide what to do on the basis of those relationships.

The next important point is whether different people recognise the same relationships and therefore the same situation as a basis for decision-making. Is there just one structure of relationships in a situation, or can different structures be recognised? If it is possible that different structures can be recognised by different people, then there may be problems with claiming that moral claims and decisions can be objective. If the participants in a situation, and perhaps those judging it, can each be correct to see the situation and its structure of relationships differently, then the decisions they will make, based on those relationships, may all be different and equally correct. In the

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[3]It should be noted that this point differs from the view about common considerations being necessary for judgment that B Williams criticises in his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), p.17-8. The point here is about the situation we are considering not what sorts of reasons or considerations we bring to bear on it.

case of the Good Samaritan there are several relationships that the protagonists have to one another; of Jew to Samaritan, of common humanity, of being travellers on the same road. I want to suggest that these are all relationships that both parties would probably agree to, although different races have differed on the issue of whether other races are truly human. Generally speaking, however, these relationships are all recognised from within the same understanding of relationships, although from different perspectives within that framework; that is both protagonists have a roughly similar understanding of the relationships between them, such that the relative priorities of those relationships to the question at issue can be debated. We might say that their situation is analogous to one of being in the same physical space and being able to compare and contrast various physical relationships. In the same way that two people could claim to be respectively to the left or to the right of the other, so the Samaritan can claim to be related to the Jew as traveller to victim whereas the Jew sees the relationship from the point of view of victim to traveller. Their understanding of their moral relationships can be reconciled to one another. But what of cases where this seems not to be the case?

For example, consider parents arranging a marriage for their daughter. From their point of view they are acting in their daughter's best interests by providing for her future in the way their tradition has found best. From the daughter's point of view, however, they are not acting in her best interests by forcing an outmoded social structure onto her life. The question here is whether the protagonists see the situation so differently that their ways of understanding it cannot be compared. I want to argue here that what they differ over is not the moral situation and the relationships involved in it, but what to do about that situation and what those relationships require. What I think both parties would agree on is the parent/child relationship and possibly the responsibility of parents to provide for their children's future. What they disagree about is how far those responsibilities go, at what point the child also takes responsibility for her future, and how best to discharge those responsibilities; that is,

they disagree about what to do in the situation that both parties recognise. Someone who argues that what it is to be a parent is to see that your child marries well, and what it is to be a child is to be obedient to your parents wishes has no basis for argument against, and no common ground, with someone who argues that to be a parent is to allow your child increasingly to determine their own future, and to be a child is to learn to do this by growing out from within the confines of a family. In fact, of course, they can have common ground, since the parent child relationship can be recognised either in biological terms, legal terms (in the case of adoption), or in terms of a much looser set of commitments, responsibilities and expectations (perhaps in the case of people living together in a family unit where the children are not necessarily the biological children of at least one of those caring for them). This not only allows them to debate what should be done in this particular case, but it also allows both parties to the discussion to develop their views as to what is appropriate to the parent/child relationship.

The above problem arises from a difference between cultures in the way they tackle a problem situation. It might also be the case that different cultures recognise different relationships. There are probably relationships in polygamous societies that our monogamous society has never developed a need for and does not recognise, although in these times new forms of extended family due to divorce and remarriage may require us to extend our notions of family relationships. It can seem tempting to say that polygamous societies have a different moral arena from ours because they recognise different relationships from the ones that we do, and that their morality is therefore incommensurable with ours. This recognition of different sorts of relationships does not, however, have to lead to incommensurability or to the conclusion that each moral system has its own truth and cannot be criticised from outside. Each society has found a solution to the stability of small social units, families, and has something to say about the various relationships and responsibilities involved in that solution. That is not to say that one solution may not be better than

another, that is that they cannot be compared, or that either is not capable of development or improvement. As long as the different societies have no connections with one another, all they respond to is their own environment, and their moral system may develop in isolation from any other. One thing, however, as we noticed in chapter two, that leads to changes in moral systems is changes in societies through contact with other societies. Thus, when societies are in contact with one another, their moralities have to start to take into account the sorts of situation recognised by each other, to recognise the sorts of structures of relationships the other recognises, and if they are merging they will need to develop a joint understanding of, and possibly modification of, the sorts of relationships and structures that form a part of the new society.

Considerations such as these suggest that, although societies may develop different understandings of the ways their members can relate to one another, and different responsibilities associated with those relationships, this does not require us to say that the truth that their moral discourse is sensitive to is a different truth for each society, and that they are beyond criticism from other societies. Neither does it require us to claim that the moral situations each recognises are in a different moral arena from each other, that there are different moral spaces. There may be very many different areas in moral space, and some may be so far away from others that it is difficult to understand how things look from there, but the very fact that we do try to understand other societies' moralities and sometimes criticise them, I think suggests that they are accessible to us, at least as long as we have some common ground with them. We generally recognise some similarities in moral relationships, some common feelings as to what general behaviour is desirable in societies. This is largely, perhaps, because the sorts of problems that humans living in social groups have to face are very similar; access to food and shelter, the care of children, how to survive in old age, what to do about those who are ill, or disruptive or non-conformist. Certainly, in the consideration of any particular judgment or decision, the protagonists must have some

things in common, since they have arrived somehow at this common situation. Although they may, as I noted earlier, have differing moral systems that deal with such situations differently, this does not seem to require that they see the situation differently.

Thus at the basis of the sorts of moral decisions and judgments we make, our examples suggest there is a common situation that the protagonists recognise, and that the importance of this situation is the structure of the relationships the protagonists are part of in moral terms. There are two questions we might consider at this point. The first is, if the protagonists may be related to one another in several different ways, is it only one or some of these relationships that are relevant to the decision or judgment being made, and if so should we consider how we might decide which? The second is whether these relationships I have been talking about as the important elements of the situation are moral relationships, as I have claimed, or merely social ones, and if they are merely social whence comes the moral imperative to act? I want to defer discussion of this latter question until I explore the nature of the moral environment and moral relationships in more detail in Chapter 5. For the moment I will simply note that, whether these relationships are moral or social they have this link with morality, that it is on the basis of these relationships that we decide what to do in moral terms, what the discipline of moral discourse requires of us in this situation.

4.2 Priority in relationships

The first question may be addressed initially by considering some more examples, and then by looking more closely at how we think about actions. If we are to maintain the objectivity of moral discourse we will need to be able to assert not only that the various relationships an agent is part of in any given situation are objectively identifiable, but also that which of the various relationships form the correct basis of decision making or judgment in that situation is objectively identifiable. In the Good

Samaritan's situation we need to be able to say not only that he was related to the robber's victim as traveller to traveller, as Samaritan to Jew and as human to human, but also that the relationship that he should use to decide what to do is that of common humanity.

If we look at how we make decisions in a variety of situations we will see that, although there may be a variety of relationships between the protagonists, some are considered relevant and some not, and we may also get an indication of the basis on which we decide which are relevant. In the case of the Good Samaritan, for example, the point of the story as it is told, is to show that the relationship of Jew to Samaritan is not the important one, that despite this relationship, what counts is the relationship of `neighbourliness', that of common humanity.

Why is this the relevant relationship? At first sight it might be tempting to say that since the relationship of common humanity has a wider scope, this justifies its being the relevant relationship. This surely will not be a universal basis for correct identification of the relevant relationship, however. Jonathan Sacks, in the third chapter of his Reith lectures, provides an example that suggests the reverse.[4] If you were in the National Gallery with your child and a fire broke out and you could only rescue one of your child, an MP or one of the works of art, if width of scope were the overriding factor in deciding what to do you would surely be obliged to give the work of art priority, since it belongs to all mankind. Or if people count over works of art, then the MP should be rescued since the societal relationship is wider than the family one. Most people, however, would surely decide, and rightly so, to rescue their child. A further consideration is that in some cases the width of scope decision would go different ways depending on what action is being considered. For example, suppose a state of affairs where a couple are director and secretary in the same firm. It might be

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[4]J.Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith: Religion, Morality and Society in a Secular Age*, The 1990 Reith Lectures (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991).

considered that the work relationship had a wider scope than the family one, since at work both are part of a larger organisation. Supposing, however, that it was normally acceptable for a director to ask her secretary to order theatre tickets for her partner's birthday, it would surely not be acceptable if the secretary were her partner. Here the familial relationship would take priority. But if what was being considered was the promotion of the secretary, then the familial relationship should take second place.

What is surely the basis of our intuitions about these different cases is that what helps to determine the relevant relationship is the type of action being contemplated and the relevance of the various relationships to this action. In the case of the Good Samaritan we have someone who is injured and we feel that considerations such as his race, or the urgency of other appointments should be irrelevant to considerations of whether to help or not. In the two cases with the partner/secretary what makes the difference between them is that in the first case the action being contemplated, ordering a birthday present, is one that occurs within the scope of the family relationship, whereas the promotion question occurs within the scope of the work relationship. The National Gallery case is trickier, since saving a life occurs both within the scope of family and human relationships. It might be here that different cultures would prioritise those relationships differently. There may be cultures (China perhaps) which would think that the politician was of more value than the family member. This would not necessarily be a problem for the sophisticated realist, since he holds that cultures can dispute about such questions, but that until the dispute is settled, if it is, there is no saying which of the competing claims is true. That is not necessarily to say that they are equally true, but just that the matter is as yet unresolved.

Consideration of cases so far supports the idea that the basis of any moral decision or judgment is a situation which is understood in terms of the various ways the protagonists in the situation are morally related to one another. There may be many

different ways of being related to one another morally, but some will be irrelevant in the case under consideration, and what decides their status in this respect is the nature of the action being contemplated. This confirms what I suggested at the start of this section, that what we judge and make decisions about in moral discourse are actions, and so I want now to turn to considering how we think about actions in more detail.

To do this I want to draw some parallels with work done by Gareth Evans in his `*The Varieties of Reference*'.[5] Here he considers the conditions under which we can have singular thoughts about material objects. Singular thoughts are here opposed to descriptive thoughts; that is, a singular thought is one which succeeds in capturing a specific object, distinguishable from all others, as opposed to capturing any object that might fit a particular description. In order to do this he discusses the nature of thought and the sorts of conceptual abilities needed to have such thoughts.

4.3 Thinking about Material objects

In Evan's model of thought, thoughts are not just something private to the individual and assessable solely on the individual's own terms. In order to be singular thoughts, or thoughts at all, they must have a particular structure, and the characterisation and individuation of particular thoughts is not something the thinking subject can do in abstraction from the situation that thinker is in. The structure of the thought is important because, to be thinking about an object, we must somehow have captured the object, and be thinking something about it. That the characterisation and individuation of thoughts be, to some extent, independent of the thinking subject is important, since it is the subject's situation which determines whether a particular object has been captured by the thought, and therefore whether anything true or false has been thought.

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[5]The idea of the Generality Constraint and the Fundamental Ground of Difference are introduced in Chapter 4, sections 3 & 4

This leads to two important concepts identified by Evans; the Generality Constraint on thoughts, and the Fundamental Ground of Difference of the objects thought about. The Generality Constraint is concerned with the structure of the thought and claims that, if we are thinking of some object that it has a particular property, e.g. of this pen that it is blue, then, in order to have a coherent concept of the object and of what we attribute to it, both parts of the thought must be able to play the same or a similar role in other thoughts. So, to have a coherent concept of "this pen", I must also be able to think of it as being transparent, as having been bought in the Union shop, as being in different places at different times, and as capable of having any of a number of suitable predicates attributed to it. Similarly, to have a coherent concept of "blue", I must be able to think of it as attributable to cups, jeans, walls and perhaps people and music as well. There will, of course, be some constraints on the appropriateness of both objects and attributes to one another. Thus "blue" would not have to be applicable to numbers, or "this pen" be capable of being thought of as prime. Evans' primary concern is with the coherence of the concept of the object the thought captures, or fails to capture, since whether a type of object is captured at all will depend on whether it can play the subject role in appropriate types of thought.

Whether however, we succeed in thinking of a particular object, that is in thinking a singular thought, depends on the other concept I mentioned earlier, the Fundamental Ground of Difference of the object. This is what allows us to distinguish a particular object from all others of its type. In the case of material objects, the Fundamental Ground of Difference is spatio-temporal location. Material objects can share all sorts of properties with objects of their type, but they cannot be in the same place at the same time as any other material object of that type. That is, the lump of marble can be in the same spatio-temporal location as the statue which it is, but two statues cannot be in the same spatio-temporal location without being the same statue. We ensure we have captured a particular object by being able to say that it is the one at this or that

spatio-temporal location. We do not necessarily have to be thinking of the object in terms of its spatio-temporal location, but we have to be thinking of it as the sort of thing that has a unique spatio-temporal location.

Further, to be able to think of the same object on another occasion, we must be able to track it through space and time. Thus a material object not only has a unique spatial location at any time, but its history is a continuous track of such locations through space-time. Thus the paradigm of singular thoughts for Evans is the demonstrative thought. In demonstrative thought we locate things in our immediate spatio-temporal neighbourhood, and we can keep track of them perceptually. That does not mean that we cannot have singular thought about objects not in our immediate vicinity, but to do so we must be thinking of them as occupying a spatio-temporal location that is on the continuous track of such locations that is the history of that object. So I can think singular thoughts about my next-door neighbour because I think of her as someone who has a continuous history through space and time, and because she does, in fact, have such a track. If it happened that the man next-door had bigamously married a pair of identical twins, both of whom I had taken to be the same person, then any thought about "her" would not be a singular thought since I would not have succeeded in capturing a particular individual with my thought. Thus an object is the particular object it is because it is continuously spatio-temporally located. This is what distinguishes it from other objects of its type, that it follows this particular space-time track.

This necessity to think of objects as located in and travelling through space and time leads to the requirement that we have an ability to locate objects and ourselves in space-time. This ability is, according to Evans, actually two abilities: the ability to conceive of ourselves as occupying space and interacting with objects in our vicinity (what Evans calls egocentric location), and the ability to have a concept of objective

space and to locate ourselves in it (objective location).[6] Thus I need a concept of myself as a spatio-temporal being interacting with objects in my vicinity, and I need to be able to understand location in places other than where I am, by understanding what it would be like for me to be there.

4.4 Action Identification

Having sketched some of the ideas that Evans uses, I want to suggest how they might be of use in classifying and individuating moral thoughts or judgments. In making moral judgments and decisions, as in thinking about material objects, it seems there is something which we identify and attribute certain qualities to. In the case of moral judgments it is not, however, objects that we identify but actions. As I argued above (section 4.1), both in judgments and in decision-making, it is actions we consider. We either judge a particular action as good/cruel/unjustifiable, or we judge a situation, person or theory because of the actions they do or allow, or the actions that lead up to or constitute them. In deciding what to do, or what sort of a person to be, how to lead our lives, we consider a variety of actions available to us, or the actions that sort of person will do or that sort of life encompasses. Some of these actions will be types of action, rather than specific actions, and therefore thoughts about them will be descriptive thoughts. At least some, however, will be singular thoughts about specific actions, and therefore to engage in moral discourse we need to be able to pick out specific actions and attribute moral properties to them.

If we were to follow Evans' position with regard to singular thoughts, it would seem that there must be two conceptual abilities here: the ability to identify particular actions, and the ability to employ concepts appropriately applicable to these sorts of action. In the case of material objects Evans looked for a Fundamental Ground of

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[6] I will consider these concepts in further detail with respect to location in a space of personal relations in Chapter 5.

Difference, that is something that would ensure that we were thinking about a specific material object rather than a type of material object, and concluded that, for material objects, this would be spatio-temporal location. The Generality Constraint claims that the type of object we are considering will affect the Fundamental Ground of Difference. If it is just a piece of matter we are considering with respect to various material properties (size, shape, weight, location etc.) then spatio-temporal location is an adequate Fundamental Ground of Difference. If, however, we are considering aesthetic properties, for example, the Generality Constraint will force us to take some account of what sorts of things aesthetic properties are applicable to, and this in turn will affect the Fundamental Ground of Difference of those objects. At some level the sort of judgments we can make of things will be determined by the sort of things they are, which will be indicated by their Fundamental Ground of Difference. Thus we judge material objects as having a certain shape, colour, position, weight etc., and that they are suitable to be so judged is indicated by their being the sort of things that have unique spatio-temporal locations. Similarly numbers can be judged as even, prime, square, irrational, transcendental etc., and that they are suitable to be so judged is indicated by their being the sorts of things that have a unique place in a numeric sequence.

Is there a parallel we can draw with actions, and will actions suitable for moral assessment require a different Fundamental Ground of Difference from other types of action? What might be unique about an action, which would allow us to identify it? I want to consider two possibilities. Firstly that it has a particular spatio-temporal location, that it is performed by a particular person in a particular place over a particular period of time. And secondly, that it has a location within a network of relationships involving obligations and responsibilities, which is at least one thing that seems to make it susceptible to moral judgment.

4.5 Location in physical space or moral space?

Any action can, I think, be seen as having two components: a movement component and an intentional component. The movement component I take to be that element of the action that could be described in physical terms, that a hand was raised and pressed a switch, for example. By the intentional component I mean that element of the action that involves some purpose of the agent, for example turning the light on. By this I do not mean to suggest either that the action is separable into these components in any ontological sense, or that one is really the action and the other either a means by which it is achieved or the purpose behind it. Thus the concerns that Ryle has with intentions as separate entities should not be a problem here.[7] I just take it that for anything to count as an action it must possess both components, with the proviso that failing to move may be part of the movement component of an action. Anything that would count as an action must be intentional and be doing something in some sense. There are some movements that we may not count as actions, ducking to avoid a cricket ball may fall into this class, because we do not see it as deliberate; even if we could ascribe a purpose to it we do not necessarily class it as voluntary, and this, I think, is an important part of the intentional component. However if we do regard the movement as an instinctive reaction to some state of affairs and do not, therefore, class it as an action, then we may run into problems with habits. These also seem to be done without any intention or purpose in mind, yet we may categorise them as good or bad habits and praise or condemn an individual for having acquired them. Perhaps though, we could consider the moral action here to be the acquisition of the habits. There could also be a problem in that some things that we might think of as actions may not seem to be associated with any movements at all. For example we may condemn someone for refusing to do something, where his refusal is not expressed verbally but just consists in not doing whatever we think he should do. I

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[7]Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin Books, 1988).

intend to treat these cases, however, as actions, although habits are perhaps actions in some secondary or derivative sense depending on how automatic they are. I will concentrate, however on actions that have both components in a straightforward manner.

Consider an action such as handing over £50 to someone. That is a transaction that occurs at a particular time and place and can be described in terms of objects and physical movements, for example, Joe taking five coloured pieces of paper out of his trouser pocket and passing them to Jim; this is its movement component. It can also be described in different ways, depending on what sort of an act it is: paying a debt, bribery, placing a bet, making a gift etc. Is either of these descriptions sufficient to distinguish it from all other actions of its kind?

In the case of material objects, no attention was paid to what sort of object we were talking about; it was considered just as being something, perhaps not even identifiable as a particular sort of object, except in so far as it could be the bearer of physical properties. We could say "That thing is round" for example, without having any idea of what sort of thing it was, except that it was in a particular position and we could conceive of it as the sort of thing to which other material properties were applicable. Does this suggest that in the case of an action its spatio-temporal location, its performance by a particular person at a particular place and time will suffice to identify it? At first sight this seems sufficient, after all it is the act we see that we judge as right or wrong. Nonetheless there seem to be two distinct problems with using this as the basis of identification.

Firstly, if we are following Evans' model of thought, then the Generality Constraint indicates that if we are to be counted as making a moral judgment, the object of that judgment must be thought of as the sort of thing that is capable of having moral predicates attributed to it. The bare physical act, of handing over £50 for example,

does not on its own seem capable of moral assessment. In fact without the intentional component, handing over £50 on its own might not even seem to count as an act. It is only because we assume that there is some intent behind the movement that we count it as an act. Until we know what sort of an act it is, however, whether a bribe or a gift for example, we cannot make a moral judgment about it. So the movement component on its own does not count as an act, and until we are considering an act we are not considering the sort of thing we can make moral judgments about.

The second point is that when we are judging an action, we may neither know nor care what physical movements were involved in the act. What we are assessing is whether that debt, for example, ought to have been paid, and we don't much care where it happened (although when might be a factor) or what form the payment took (cash, cheque, credit card?). Although it had to happen somewhere and in some particular form of payment, this doesn't seem essential to identifying the payment of the debt as this debt payment rather than another. What does seem important are the agents involved. What makes it this debt payment that is being thought about is surely that it is a debt between these particular people that has been cancelled. Further, there might be difficulty in deciding the exact spatio-temporal location of the payment; is it when the cheque is put in the post, or received by the creditor, or cleared through his bank account? Is it even a single action rather than a sequence of actions that counts as paying the debt?[8] Or is an act identifiable with any physical movement at all, as in the case of refusal to act mentioned above? All these seem to pose problems with citing the movement as the sole, or even primary grounds for identification of actions.

On the other hand, if we try to use what I have called the intentional component of the action to identify it we seem to run into a different set of problems. How can we

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[8]See, for example, the discussion of the definition of an act in P J Fitzgerald, 'Voluntary and Involuntary Acts', in *The Philosophy of Action*, ed. A R White, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), and A C Danto's discussion in 'Basic Actions' in the same volume.

possibly identify someone's intentions in performing an act? How do we, in fact, tell actions from movements? The first important thing to note, I think, is that we seem to have little difficulty in deciding whether something is a deliberate act or a random movement and I think an important factor in deciding this is the context within which the act or movement occurs. Normally, for example, we would regard breathing more as an automatic or reflex movement than as an act, it is not something we think of as being done deliberately. Yet if we are at the opera, watching a singer breathe in, preparatory to singing an aria, then we would tend to think of this as a deliberate act. Other movements seem indisputably to be acts of some sort, the example of handing over £50 is one. They are not the sort of things we do without some purpose in mind.

When we identify something as an action, therefore, rather than a movement, we attribute a purpose of some sort to the agent, and we do so on the basis of the context within which the act occurs. We see the act as a response to that context. When we identify the act as one susceptible to moral judgment, however, I think we do more than this; we see it as a response to a context which contains commitments, responsibilities and expectations. We see the participants in the actions as situated in, what for want of a better phrase I will call a network of relationships involving these commitments, responsibilities and expectations. Handing over £50 is only identified as payment of a debt if it is an action that takes place in response to a situation where payments are made and liabilities incurred. Further, it is only the debt that it is, because it is incurred between two particular individuals who are located within that network. So, in order to identify something as an action about which we can make a moral judgment it seems that we have to see the agent as located in a network of relationships with commitments, responsibilities and expectations, as perhaps being so placed in that network as to have a variety of different relations to others in that network, and to see the act as a response to one of those relationships.

So here we might have another way of thinking about actions. An act will be the type of act it is because it is a response to a particular type of relationship between the agent and some other element(s) in a network of commitments, responsibilities and expectations, and it will be the particular act it is because it is a response to a particular relationship between the agent and others. Thus I may have incurred a variety of debts, but my payment of £50 will be the resolution of a particular debt owed to a particular individual at a particular time.

This way of thinking of things suggests then a different sort of location, analogous to location in physical space. Just as in physical space we locate ourselves by our spatial and causal relations to the objects around us, in order to think about acts in moral terms we also need to locate the agent in a different sort of space where he is related to other elements in that space, not by spatial relations but by moral relationships and the commitments, responsibilities and expectations that belong with these. I say `elements', since it I want to keep an open mind about what we may have responsibilities towards and vice versa. These may be other persons, but equally they may be groups, institutions, animals, inanimate objects, or anything else we might think we have commitments to, responsibilities for or which can reasonably expect something of us. Furthermore, some of these elements may be easier to identify in this moral space than in physical space. For example, we may consider a university as having responsibilities towards its students, and vice versa, and thus see both `the university' and its `students' as elements of a moral space, and yet have distinct difficulties in identifying either element in physical terms.

Will this location in moral space work as a Fundamental Ground of Difference for actions? Again we seem to have problems using it on its own. Firstly, I am not sure that the action can be seen as taking place in this moral space, although I have called it a response to relationships in this space. The payment of a debt is a response to a relationship between two elements in moral space, but the payment itself does not

seem to be an element in moral space. And secondly, the nature of the relationship between the agent and others in this moral space may be just what is disputed in moral assessment of the action. Are they really related as giver and recipient of a gift, or are there expectations attached to the gift that means the relationship is really one of bribery? What type of action this is, not just what particular action this is will depend on the identification of the relationship. If, however, in considering a moral action, we are able to think of it while disputing the nature of the relationship between the people involved, then which action it is cannot be identified solely by the relationship it is a response to.

It appears, therefore, that we have two distinct elements in identifying an act, neither of which can on its own be regarded as the basis of a Fundamental Ground of Difference of an action. It can be seen as a movement or sequence of movements, but this is too narrow an identification to allow us to pass moral judgment on it, and may not even be known or identified by someone who is passing a moral judgment on the act. It can also be seen as an act by an agent who has a location in what I am calling a moral network or space, and an act which is a response to some relationship between the agent and other elements of that moral situation. Because the nature of the relationship may be in dispute without making it impossible to identify or think about the act, we cannot hold that the relationship is the sole determinant of the act. So neither the spatio-temporal location of the act, nor its being a response to the relationship between the agent and others will uniquely identify the act. Of course we cannot say that neither of these is relevant, since if there are no movements to the act and it is not a response to any relationship then there is nothing that we are talking about. That is we could identify a set of movements and question what relationship they were relative to and therefore what sort of act it was, or we could identify a particular act relative to a relationship without knowing which actual set of movements it was, but if there is neither of these components, then there is no act.

Before I turn to the possibility that what individuates an act is a combination of these two I briefly want to consider the idea that it is performed by the agent with some intention, and this is what makes it the act it is.[9] While I would not deny this, and after all I started off by claiming that to be an act some movement or set of movements had to have an intentional component, I think that this way of individuating the act is derivative. If some act is performed with some intention, then in order to identify the intention we still have to see the act as a response to some relationship. If the Good Samaritan acts with the intention of helping a fellow human being, then that intention is dependent on there being such a relationship between him and the Jew. If my intention in rushing heroically into a burning house is to save my son, that intention derives from our relationship. Even if we would say that paying a debt in general is handing over money with an intention to reimburse a lender, this presupposes a general type of relation between lenders and debtors out of which that type of intention arises. This is not just an argument about the order in which we think of things. The important point is that I do not see how we could form an intention to repay a debt if there was not already a relationship between lender and debtor. It is because I have borrowed money that a debt repayment is handing over money with an intention to repay. If I attribute such an intention to someone, I presuppose that such a relationship exists.[10] So although it is true to say that an act is performed with some intention, I do not think it is possible to say what the intention is independently of some relationship to which it is a response. I turn now to the possibility of identifying the action in terms of both ideas, spatio-temporal location, and location in a network of relationships with commitments, responsibilities and expectations.

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[9]The sense of intention here is that used, for example, by G E M Anscombe in her 'Intention', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 57 (1956-7), 321-32.

[10]A similar argument is used in chapter 5 to show that desires derive from relationships and cannot be individuated independently of them.

4.6 Location in physical and moral space

If we cannot identify an action completely in either physical or moral terms, will a combination of the two do? Perhaps the case can be seen as analogous to making an aesthetic judgment about a material object. There, for example, for it to be the Mona Lisa that we are considering there must be a particular material object that follows a particular track through space-time, but it must also be identifiable as a painting, as something that belongs to a certain class of art objects. Thus to identify the object of aesthetic judgment we need two abilities: the ability to identify material objects in general, and the ability to categorise something as a particular type of object suitable for aesthetic judgment. We may, when we make the judgment, only be thinking of it in terms of its membership of a class of art objects, but we must also be willing to identify it as the painting that is a particular material object. So if we are asked which painting we are thinking of, we will perhaps identify it as "the one painted by Leonardo in the Louvre", that is, the one that started its particular space-time track when it was painted by Leonardo and at this point on it is hanging in the Louvre.

Do we, in a similar way, need to have some abilities analogous to the two needed for aesthetic judgment, in order to make moral judgments? To count as an action suitable for moral assessment, the action must be a response to the relationships the agent has in what I am calling the moral network. Although when making a judgment about such an action, we may only think of it in those terms, must we not also be willing to identify it as a particular movement or sequence of movements by the agent. We may think of a payment as resolving a debt between two individuals, but if asked what payment we are talking about we must surely be able to say something like "Joe handing £50 in used tenners to Jim last Friday evening". This suggests that to identify an action we need to be able to identify both a sequence of movements by the agent at particular places and times, and to identify the same agent as being related in certain ways, relevant to the action, to others in a moral network. Part of the Fundamental

Ground of Difference of an action can be the movements comprising it, but to make moral judgments about the action we need to be able to locate ourselves and others not only in physical space but in a moral network; in the same way that we can say the Fundamental Ground of Difference of material objects is their spatio-temporal location when we are making purely material judgments, but will have to be expanded to include location in the realm of art objects if we are making an aesthetic judgment. In fact I feel that all actions, not just ones susceptible of moral judgment, will need an Fundamental Ground of Difference that is more than the movements that comprise that action, they will all be locatable in some other space as well, if they are to count as actions as opposed to involuntary movements. So perhaps it would be better to say that the fundamental ground of difference of an action requires that it be a response to a relationship between the agent and others who are themselves located both spatio-temporally and in a network of commitments, responsibilities and expectations, and also a movement or series of movements locatable in space and time. We might then have to consider whether moral actions are a subset of actions in general which is identified by the sorts of commitments, responsibilities and expectations that may be peculiar to the moral sphere.

Of course the case is also different from aesthetic judgment in that in aesthetic judgment the object that is being judged is located both in physical space and in some class of art objects. So it is the object itself that is located in two arenas. In the case of actions, the action itself is located in physical space as a movement or sequence of movements, but what is located in moral space is the agent and the other elements of that space that he is related to. This location of the agent and others in moral space is not just what makes the action the action it is, but what makes it an action at all, rather than just a series of movements. The action itself is a response to one or more of those relationships between the elements in moral space. That is it is the type of action it is because it is a response to a type of relationship, but it is the particular action it is because it consists of a particular movement or sequence of movements.

and is a response to a particular moral relationship. It differs from all other actions of its type both in the spatio-temporal location of its movement component, and in the moral location and relationships of the agent who supplies its intentional component.

The other point about thinking of physical objects was that we could think of the same object at different times and still capture that object because of the continuity of its track through space-time. That is, all thoughts about the Mona Lisa capture the Mona Lisa if there is a unique object that travels on a unique and continuous track through space and time, and it is this object that is identified by the thinker. Actions, however, do not seem to travel or be continuous in physical space and time, or in moral space, in the same sort of way. They are one-off events, they happen only once, although they may have repercussions long after they happened. So what could it be that allows us to think of the same action at different times? What ensures that we are judging the accused for the crime he was arrested for, or praising someone for what she actually did? The important continuity here is continuity of the agent and other protagonists in both moral and physical space. What makes it the case that we are now thinking about the same debt payment between Joe and Jim as we were previously, is that Joe and Jim each follow a continuous space-time track in both physical and moral space. Thus in both physical and moral space they may no longer be related as they were when the action took place, in fact if the debt is paid off they cannot be, but they have continuity in both spaces, and it is this continuity that allows them to be identified and re-identified in both spaces, and thus the action to be identified and re-identified.

4.7 Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that for moral judgments and decisions to be objective, to be susceptible to truth, they must be about something, and they must be sensitive to the situations on the basis of which they are made. In the first part of the chapter I

considered the sorts of things we take into account when we make moral judgments or decisions, and concluded that one of the things we have to identify and be sensitive to is the situation the maker of the judgment or decision is considering. This situation consists in, among other things, a structure of relationships between what I have variously called the elements or the protagonists of that situation. These are not spatial relationships, but social, political, economic and moral. As spatial relationships are structured by the causal powers of the objects located in space, I shall argue in the next chapter that personal relationships are structured by their commitments, responsibilities and expectations. We need to be able to identify these relationships in order to decide what to do in this situation, in Wright's terms how to apply the discipline, to come to an objective decision or judgment.

In the second part of the chapter I considered what moral judgments and decisions are about, and concluded that some, if not all of them, are about particular actions. I argued therefore, that in order to make judgments and decisions about actions we must be able to think about types of actions and particular actions. Using Gareth Evans' constraints on thinking of material objects, the Fundamental Ground of Difference and the Generality Constraint, I argued that for actions to be the sorts of things that are susceptible to moral judgment we must be able to identify them not only with a movement or sequence of movements, but also with a relationship between the agent and others in moral space. The action is not itself located in moral space or part of the relationship, although it may contribute to how the relationship develops, or fails to develop, but it is a response to that relationship. The identification of the action depends on the identification, location of and relationships between elements in moral space.

In the next chapter I want to consider one model of how we are located and locatable in moral space. I will start from the consideration that to make moral judgments and decisions we must be related to others in the way I suggested is necessary for all

actions above, that is our relationships must have commitments, responsibilities and expectations. I will consider how we might identify such relationships and what our ability to identify them tells us about their nature. In the course of this I hope to show how what some might be tempted to call mere social, political or economic relations with no moral import are in fact moral relations to some degree or another, although some may think that this is not a strong enough understanding of what morality is. I will also consider how this view of moral space allows for development of different and sometimes conflicting moral disciplines, but also for resolutions of the conflicts; that is how the constraints of objectivity might operate in moral space.

Chapter 5: Moral Relationships

So to summarise the progress so far. I have shown that moral language and thought can be objective, that is moral claims are candidates for truth, and that truth here is not a special kind of truth relative to the moral way of thinking in general or to particular moral systems or discourses. Although the approach of the Sophisticated Moral Realist is not to start with metaphysical claims, she does, as a result of analysing moral discourse with respect to truth, arrive at the position that there are moral truths or facts which are facts about how the world is as seen from the moral point of view. This position is, therefore, a cognitivist position. The Sophisticated Moral Realist holds that our moral beliefs are beliefs about the moral environment we are part of, and the fact that we have in part created this environment does not mean that our beliefs about it cannot be true. There are moral facts to be got hold of. The next question to be addressed is whether this is an internalist or an externalist cognitivist position. In J Dancy's first chapter of his `*Moral Reasons*' he describes the difference between these positions in terms of Humean beliefs and desires and the requirement that moral judgments motivate us, that we are moved to do what we judge to be right. For non-cognitivists the position is relatively simple; since they believe that moral judgments express desires and the job of desires is to motivate, those judgments motivate. Of cognitivists he says

> "Cognitivists have a choice, however. They can be internalists, holding that moral judgements express peculiar beliefs which, unlike normal beliefs, cannot be present without motivating. Or they can be externalists, holding that moral judgements express beliefs which rely on the presence of an independent desire if they are to motivate."[1]

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[1]Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.3.

Straightforward Humean beliefs do not motivate, so a cognitivist has either to hold that moral beliefs are a different, motivating, sort of belief, or she has to add desires to her beliefs to do the motivating for her. Dancy's solution, as a cognitivist, is to reject the Humean picture of beliefs as non-motivating representations of information and desires as essentially motivating states, in favour of pairs of representations, of how things are and how they ought to be, and the motivating is done by our perception of the gap between these motivations. This he does not only apply to moral action but to action in general. That is all our action is motivated by these two representations and none of it requires Humean beliefs and desires.

I have claimed that we do have moral beliefs, but have said nothing much about the nature of those beliefs, other than that they can be true (that is what makes them beliefs) and that they are based on our understanding of relationships between moral agents and other elements of the moral environment. In this chapter I want to look more closely at our understanding of these relationships, and in the course of this investigation more about the nature of moral beliefs, as I understand them, will emerge. My position will be a little hard to categorise in Dancy's terms; it is internalist in that it does not need to add on desires to motivate, but the beliefs the agent has motivate in a secondary sense because of what they are beliefs about. What motivates us is the relationships we are part of, and it is because the relationships have what I call `pull' to them that the beliefs the sophisticated moral realist has motivate her actions. The story I want to tell could, perhaps, be told in terms of beliefs and desires of a Humean kind, but I do not think that this is what is fundamental to explanation of and decisions about actions. It will be my contention that in order to explain action in terms of beliefs and desires, those beliefs and desires have to be identified or individuated, and this cannot be done without reference to the relationships between participants. The fundamental level of explanation will be in terms of beliefs about relationships that motivate, and because there are these motivating relationships, we can identify belief/desire pairs in terms of which we

could explain action. It is because I am someone's friend that my beliefs about her situation and my desires to help her can be used to explain my action. Those beliefs and desires, however, are individuated in terms of that relationship of friendship, and my action could be explained simply by saying that I believed she needed help and that our friendship moved me to help her. If beliefs are representations of information, them some of the information that beliefs about personal relationships represent has the power to motivate. They have, as Dancy puts it, a mind-to-world direction of fit, they have to fit the world, but the world is such as to motivate us, to move us to action. This may, I think, be something that is peculiar to thought about such relationships, but as I argue at the end of the chapter, this gives a wide enough scope to cover many areas of human activity. Before we get there, however, we need to consider how we understand the relationships that are the basis of our moral judgments and decision-making.

5.1 Egocentricity and Objectivity

In the last chapter I identified two ways in which relationships grounded the objectivity of moral judgments and decision-making. These judgments or decisions might, in general terms, be thought of as judgments or decisions about what ought to be done. Since talk of `what I ought to do' or `what ought to be done' might suggest that this automatically brings in a system of rules and principles, I prefer to talk of having reasons for what we do in a situation in the hope that this has more neutral implications. That is, talk of moral decisions and judgments, such as I used in the last chapter, might be taken to be talk of morality as Bernard Williams understands it as opposed to more general ethical talk.[2] So firstly, in order to have reasons for making a judgment or deciding to act, we need to recognise a situation in the context of which the judgement or decision is made. This situation, I claimed, is recognised in terms of

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[2]Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana Press/Collins, 1985), p.6.

the various relationships between those involved, and the relationships are ones that have responsibilities, commitments or expectations as essential components. Secondly, what we make judgments or decisions about in such situations are actions, and to do this we need to be able to identify these actions, we need to be able to talk or think about this particular action, not just an action of this type. Adapting some ideas from Evans' *'The Varieties of Reference'*[3] I tried to identify a Fundamental Ground of Difference of actions. I concluded that actions have two components, a movement component, that is the physical movements (or lack of movement) which would be part of the action, and the intentional component, which gave the movement component some purpose. Neither component cans serve as a Fundamental Ground of Difference on its own, so both are needed to identify the action and the intentional component requires us to locate those involved in some relationship which has responsibilities, expectations and commitments.

So when we look to our moral practices we discover that a pre-requisite for making moral judgments and decisions is to locate those involved in relationships that have as essential components responsibilities, commitments or expectations. That these are essential components is shown by the fact that the reason for action depends on the nature of the relationship in terms of its responsibilities, commitments and expectations. If there were nothing about a relationship that laid certain responsibilities or expectations on those involved, then there would be no need to know how they were related in order to decide what to do, or whether a particular act was the act it was. For example, if all there is to a situation is the spatial relationships involved, then the fact that I have a two metre long pole in my hand and am standing one metre away from a lamppost would give me no reason not to swing it round my head. If it were a person I was one metre away from, it is because people have responsibilities and commitments towards and expectations of other people that it

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[3]Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

would be wrong to swing the pole, and the action would be a different action, it would be an attack, or an injuring, not just a swing of a pole. In other words, it is the personal as well as the spatial relationships that people are involved in which provide reasons for what we do, and those reasons are provided by the commitments, responsibilities and expectations we have of other people in virtue of being in such personal relationships with them. If there were no responsibilities or expectations involved in personal relationships, then those relationships could not be part of the reason for acting in a particular way, and would be no help in identifying an action. In fact the responsibilities, commitments and expectations need to be what makes the relationship the one it is. Certain types of commitments, responsibilities and expectations make up a type of relationship, and particular responsibilities, commitments and expectations make up particular relationships. The relationship between me and the person to whom I owe money is a debt because a debt is a commitment, responsibility or expectation to pay back money borrowed. To take on a debt is not merely to receive money from someone and then later consider whether or not we are required to repay, it is to take on the requirement to repay. If we dispute about the requirement to repay we do so not on the grounds that debts do not have to be repaid but that it was a gift not a debt or some such thing. If the relationship between a policemen and a dangerous criminal he is about to arrest involved no expectations about what would be appropriate behaviour, then it would play no part in deciding whether the behaviour involved was appropriate. If we came upon two people wrestling another to the ground, and their relationship to one another was unimportant we would have no grounds for identifying what was going on (an arrest or an attack) or deciding whether it was something we should interfere in or not. It is the nature of the relationship between a policeman and criminals that allows the policeman to tackle someone who is escaping arrest and requires others not to interfere in the process.

The next important question is whether this identification of relationships which is necessary for moral decision-making or judgment is sufficient for it. If we recognise these relationships as ones with commitments and leading to expectations of behaviour appropriate to them, does this take us as far as morality, as it has traditionally been understood. Does it lead to general moral laws or principles, does it ensure that similarity of situation leads to similarity of judgment, or that what we do in one case, or a set of similar cases should guide our actions in future cases of that kind? It may be that the relationships we are involved in, although they constrain our behaviour in some ways, do not constrain it morally. As a Christian I should go to church regularly, as a driver I should drive on the left, as a chess player I should stick to the rules, as an MP I should vote with the whip, as a doctor I should have qualified, as a parent I should register the birth of my child. But are any of these moral requirements, and if so which? In order not to beg the question about morality, I will initially call these relationships, personal relationships. These are the sorts of relationships that people enter into or find themselves engaged in, which involve commitments, responsibilities or expectations. I will also talk about making personal decisions or judgments, by which I will mean decisions or judgments about what to do in a situation based on these sorts of relationships, without yet committing myself to their being moral decisions or judgments.

In order to attempt to answer the question about whether our personal relationships are sufficient as a basis for morality in the traditional sense, I want to consider what capacities we need to be able to recognise such relationships, and to be able to make objective judgments about them. Whether these are moral relationships or not, if they function as a pre-requisite for the decisions or judgments we make, we need to be able to recognise them and to do so in a manner subject to correction; we have to be capable of being right or wrong about them. In investigating this I shall use ideas and arguments analogous to those used by Evans with reference to location in physical space. I think that this is a useful analogy because what Evans is doing is showing

how understanding spatial location objectively requires both an understanding from no particular point of view and an understanding from a particular egocentric point of view.[4] To think of something as `over there' requires the ability to locate it with reference to the thinker, in a egocentric representation of space, but for the thought to be one that can be constrained by the truth, can be objective, the object must be something that is located in space. Further, this location can be represented in ways other than how the egocentric perspective perceives it; the spatial relationship between thinker and object must be representable on a cognitive map, an impersonal representation of spatial relationships.

This combination of egocentric and objective understanding is also something we think necessary for decisions about how to act. In such cases we have to take account, both of how things look to us from here, and how they are. We may well hold that one of the factors in such personal decision-making is how things look to the people involved. But if we think, as we seem to, that people can be wrong in the decision they have made, that there are better and worse decisions to be made in a situation, then we are also holding that how things look to those involved is not the only basis from which the judgment or decision can be made. We think that we can achieve at least some independence from how things look to the decision-maker and validly criticise their decision. This suggests that we feel that decisions and judgments in personal terms can be made from perspectives other than that of those involved, and that relationships can be identified by others who are not part of those particular relationships. That is, if the relationship two people are involved in is a friendship, then what it is appropriate to do in a particular situation will be something that others who are not part of that particular friendship can make judgments about. The nature of the relationship can be recognised from other egocentric perspectives and judgments made from those perspectives. In saying this, however, the claim is not

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[4]Evans, Chapter 6, section 3 for a discussion of egocentric thinking in spatial terms.

that the correct view of a relationship or situation is constructed out of the different views the thinker and others may have of it, but that people will understand it and perhaps come to agree about it because of the way this situation is. This is to take Wiggins' second mark of truth seriously, that the truth commands convergence, that we agree about how things are because of the way they are, not merely because of a preference for agreement over disagreement.[5] If relationships are identifiable by different people, this is because there is something to be identified objectively. I am not someone's friend merely because I or others think that I am; to count as friendship, our relationship must surely conform to some normative constraints, the responsibilities, commitments and expectations that go to make it up, and as a result my friend and others will tend to concur in this judgment, and recognise the relationship. In the identification or recognition of relationships, as in the judgments based on that recognition, objectivity requires the possibility of being mistaken about things. If I have to get the relationships right in a situation in order to have reasons that will stand up to criticism for the judgments and decisions I make, then I must also have the possibility of getting them wrong. This means that the relationships I am part of cannot of necessity be constituted by my understanding of them. Stalkers, for example, often think that they are involved in a romantic relationship with a public figure, and behave accordingly, but they are mistaken; their devotion is not reciprocated and the object of their attention wants nothing to do with them. Personal relationships may be reciprocal or not, the problem with stalkers is that they think that they are involved in a reciprocal relationship, but they are wrong about that, the relationship is a one-sided one. People can misunderstand the nature of the relationship that they are actually engaged in, or can come to realise that they have misunderstood it; for example, people who do not realise that they are in love although it is obvious to all their acquaintances and friends. The nature of the

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[5]David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth*, 2nd. ed., (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 149-50. For my discussion of the marks of truth and their applicability to sophisticated moral realism see chapter 2.

relationships we are involved in cannot, if we can be mistaken about them, be constituted by our understanding of them. So there are these two elements in our understanding of personal relationships, the individual perspective on them and how they are objectively. I now want to consider in more detail how Evans uses these two ideas in thinking about material objects before seeing if and how they can be applied to thinking about personal relations and the actions appropriate to them.

5.2 Objective and egocentric spatial thinking

In Chapter 6 of *Varieties of Reference*[6], Evans claims that we require two sorts of spatial location abilities to make objective spatial judgments He calls them egocentric location, an understanding of spatial relationships from the subject's perspective, and objective location, an impersonal representation of space, the possession of a cognitive map. A cognitive map favours no particular perspective, every place is represented in the same way as any other place, it is from no point of view. It is this cognitive map which allows the truth/judgment distinction to have a hold in spatial claims. It is this map that tells us whether Warwick is really between Stratford and Coventry, or whether my house is the last one before our road opens up into a green. Thus possession of a cognitive map is the ability to think objectively about space, to think about it in a way that makes claims about locations, spatial relations and objects candidates for truth.

To be able to think of space in this objective way, however, we also need an egocentric understanding of space. There are two reasons for this. The first is that to use our objective understanding, an understanding from no particular perspective, or to be credited with possession of such an understanding, we need to be able to think of ourselves as being at some place in this objective space. The second is that to

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[6]Evans, p 151-170.

understand spatial relations at all we have to have experience of a world of causally related objects. The objective understanding, the cognitive map is from no particular perspective, but we cannot use the map to think of space unless we can locate ourselves on it, that is, it is of no use unless a perspective can be inserted into it. A street map of Warwick will only help me to find the Castle if I can locate myself both in relationship to my immediate surroundings and to how those are represented on the map. Only if I know that I am standing by St. Mary's Church facing up Northgate Street, can the map tell me that if I turn round I will be facing the Castle. The capacity of egocentric location is one that places me in relation to the objects surrounding me; St. Mary's Church, Northgate Street and the Castle. The capacity of objective location is one that uses my egocentric location, my relatedness to the surrounding objects, to locate me on a cognitive map, a representation of space from no particular perspective.

Egocentric location is not simply, however, a particular perspective on space, obtainable by someone or something that has inputs from that space, it is not merely a theoretical understanding.. Our understanding of space and spatial relations depends also on our ability to act in that space, on the relation between input from that space and our output to it and how that modifies subsequent input. A sound comes from our left and we turn towards it, something bars our progress forward and we move around it, something falls from above us and we duck or jump to avoid it. Evans says that egocentric spatial terms "derive their meaning in part from their complicated connections with the subject's *actions*".[7] A similar point is made by Charles Taylor when he relates the orientation of our perceptual field to how we move and act in that field.[8] It is not just the receiving of information from our surroundings that allows us to understand how we are located in a particular part of space, but the response to that

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[7]Evans, p.155

[8]C Taylor, 'The Validity of Transcendental Arguments', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, lxxix (1978-9), 151-65, (p.154).

information, actually being in that space and causally interacting with the things in it. We understand spatial concepts because we are embedded in a causally connected environment. Our physical environment is one we learn about through our responses to it and feedback from those responses. That is, the objective spatial relations we think about are relations between objects that have causal connections which affect those spatial relations.

Despite this being egocentric location, spatial relations are not discovered or thought of primarily as relations to the individual. That is, what I come to understand in egocentric space are terms such as `in front', `above', `to the left' not `in front of me', `above me' or `to my left'. The latter would require me to have primarily identified myself and then to locate directions or objects relative to that self, and this, Evans thinks, is not possible. Also, if what I have learnt in the way of directions are all relative to me, then I cannot understand that the Castle is to the south of Warwick, since I have not understood `to the south of' but only `to the south of me'. Evans claim is that the understanding and identification of the self is not prior to and separable from that of the space it finds itself in, but that it finds itself, or learns about itself as a spatial object, by being in space and responding to it, by being part of this causal network. Further he says that the spatial relations I understand in egocentric thinking are of the same sort as those that apply to other objects. That is, egocentric thinking in spatial terms has to regard the thinker as an object among other objects, having the sorts of relations to them that objects have to one another.

So these egocentric spatial relations are neither purely to do with having information from space, but depend on our being part of the causal network of spatially related objects, nor are they relations essentially related to the individual, but relations that can hold between any objects in space. That is, they are neither entirely theoretical, nor are they subjective. A third point to make about them is that they are not relations in a special space. What we have here is not an understanding of egocentric space,

but an egocentric understanding of space. That is the space and the spatial relations that we come to understand egocentrically are exactly the same space and exactly the same kind as relations that we understand objectively. We have a cognitive map of how things are spatially related in which we can locate ourselves egocentrically, but the egocentric space, the part of that space immediately surrounding us, is such that we have to be able to impose the objective way of understanding on it. Thus there is only one space and only one type of spatial relationships.

We need to remember this because talk of a cognitive map brings with it a tendency to think of it as like a street map. The problem with this is that such a map need not relate things spatially. For example, a map reproduced on a computer screen may be created from information which is not stored spatially, but in terms of differences in electrical potential, or in terms of formulae. This suggests that a cognitive map is not essentially spatial at all. This is the idea of a map as Crispin Wright uses it to talk about modest realism. He claims, drawing on an example of Frege's, that realism sees human thought as mapping the world but, although maps may "better or worse represent the terrain which they concern ... nothing about that terrain will owe its existence, or character, to the institution of cartography or to the conventions and techniques therein employed."[9] That is, a map may represent features of what it maps without itself having those features. This is not, however, either what Evans is suggesting, nor what is required for the possibility of being mistaken about spatial relations. The egocentric understanding and the objective understanding are understanding of the same relations. What objectivity requires is an understanding of how things are spatially related independently of the subject's particular perspective, but not necessarily independently of any perspective at all. There is a tendency to think of this, and Evans sometimes talks of it so, as how things are spatially related from no perspective at all, and the idea of a map encourages this. But if the objective

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[9]Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p.2.

understanding is perspectiveless, has no perspectives in it, then it is difficult to see how we could locate a perspective within it, especially if it could go so far as to have no spatial relations in it at all. To be able to use it as a corrective on egocentric understanding we have to be able to impose it on our egocentric understanding, to bring it into coincidence with egocentric understanding. That is, any point on the cognitive map has to be a possible origin of an egocentric perspective. The egocentric perspective has equally to be locatable on the cognitive map, it has to be a perspective on that map. So they both have to be the same sort of understanding; the egocentric as an orientation within a particular portion of the objective, and the objective as an understanding that encompasses the possibility of orientation at any point on it. The egocentric understanding will be the subject's appreciation of how things look from here, but it will be correct or not in terms of how things are, seen from here, and this is what is represented on the cognitive map.

That is, that what changes in moving from the egocentric to the objective understanding of spatial relations is not perhaps best spoken of as the move from the personal to the impersonal understanding and certainly not from the subjective to the objective. In a sense both the egocentric and the objective spatial understanding are impersonal and objective, they are both an understanding of ourselves as objects amongst other objects and of the relationship between those objects. It is just that the egocentric understanding looks at these objects and their relations from a frame of reference of which the thinker is the origin. It is in this frame of reference, from this point of view, that the thinker learns about herself as an object among other objects and about the sorts of relations that can obtain between objects. Within this frame of reference, however, the thinker can be mistaken about how things are. The objective understanding does not have to be from any other frame of reference, but it is an understanding of objects and their relations that, because they are real, contains the possibility of their being represented in another frame of reference with another origin, being understood from another point of view. It is a consequence of the spatial

relations between things being objective that they will be recognisable by other people. When the individual thinker makes mistakes or is deluded she may think of objects and relations between them that are not objective. Things will look a particular way to her in her frame of reference, but if things are not objectively that way, then precisely because of that they will not be understood to be that way from some other frame of reference.

What makes me right to say that there is a desk in front of me is that there is a desk in front of me, that is that there are spatial relations between the desk and me. These relations are objective, they are candidates for truth, and because of that both I and the desk will be understood by others to be in that relationship. I could, however be mistaken about the desk, and if I am there is not a desk in front of me, and a consequence of this is that others will not understand there to be a desk in front of me; the putative desk and I will not be understood to be in that relationship from other perspectives. Perhaps, rather than saying that the difference between the egocentric and the objective understanding is that the egocentric is personal and the objective impersonal, it would be better to say that the egocentric essentially occurs in one frame of reference, but that is a frame of reference within, a perspective on, the objective understanding which contains and supports many frames of reference and perspectives.

What is important here is that the possibility of different perspectives is not what makes the understanding objective. It is because the understanding is objective that there is the possibility of different perspectives. Thus the objective understanding is not constructed out of or constituted by different perspectives, but because it is an understanding of how objects, whether they are people or not, have certain causal and spatial connections, it encompasses the possibility that a variety of perspectives can be taken on the same objects and their relations, they can be understood from a number of points of view. Any thinker has a perspective on space, the egocentric

understanding, but they also understand that it is a perspective on a space that does not depend on any perspective or collections of perspectives for its correctness, although it encompasses and supports a variety of perspectives on it. It does not require the adoption of any particular perspective, but it does require the possibility that different perspectives be adoptable. If a spatial relationship is objective then a number of perspectives on it may be adopted. So the requirement of objectivity is that the thinker is able, not exactly to move away from their perspective so much as to disregard it, to regard themselves as an object among other objects, and make sure that the relationships they are attributing to themselves are subject to the same sorts of constraints as the relationships they recognise to hold between other objects. `To the south of' must be used in the same way in `To the south of me' as it is in `to the south of London', and `in front of' in the same way in `the desk is in front of me' as in `the engine is in front of the train'.

So to be able to make spatial judgments that are candidates for truth, that are subject to a truth/judgment distinction we need to have both an egocentric understanding of spatial relatedness, and an objective understanding with which our egocentric understanding can be brought into coincidence. That is, the requirements of truth are an understanding that allows us to disregard our own particular perspective, but to understand spatial relations at all we have to be located in, perceptive of and active in space. Both having a particular location, knowing what it is to be located in space, and having the imaginative ability to think of ourselves as one object among others located somewhere on an objective cognitive map of some area of space are necessary for our moving around in space and making judgments about that space and its occupants. As Evans says

> "If *that place* is conceived by him [the subject] to be real . . . he must know what it is for a place identified in one of these ways [i.e. having a designation in his system of egocentric spatial relations] to be *that*

place - a knowledge which must bring in a conception of the spatially extended causal processes that underlie his afferent and efferent connections with the place."[10]

5.3 Objective Personal Understanding

If maintaining a truth/judgment distinction in moral discourse requires an ability to identify situations of personal relatedness, will a similar state of affairs obtain to the one Evans suggests? We will certainly need to understand how others can be personally related to one another, and understand it as a relationship that does not depend on how we see it. Consider the case of suddenly seeing two people attacking another in the street. My immediate perception may be that this is a mugging, but perhaps it is street theatre, or two plain clothes policemen arresting a violent criminal. In order to judge the situation truly it needs to be the sort of thing that is assessable from some stance other than just my immediate perceptions. In deciding how to behave towards a colleague, friend or family member, I need to consider what our relationship is, not just how it looks from my point of view. Point of view is something we have to be careful about, here. It could be taken to mean how things are subjectively, or it could mean having a particular perspective on an objective state of affairs. In the second sense the individual will always see things from their point of view. Even if they imaginatively take another's point of view this entails adopting it as their own, imagining what it would be like to be so placed. But this is not the same as seeing, understanding or considering things subjectively. The fact that I cannot in some sense get out of my own perspective does not mean that how things look to me is how they are, or that this perspective I have is not a perspective on some objective situation. So when I say that we need to consider what our relationships with other are, not just how they look to us, what I mean is not that we need to abandon a

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[10]Evans p.167. The material in square brackets is mine.

perspective on those relationships which will give us a distorted view of them. In the way I am using perspective, we will always have that sort of perspective. What I am claiming is that the relationships we are considering are things that are independent of how they happen to look subjectively. What relationships we are involved in, however, will affect how they looks to me and to others, and will affect our behaviour in response to them. A teenager may feel resentment at being given a curfew when they have school next day, but from the parent's point of view this is for the child's benefit, and it is one of the responsibilities of being a parent to help them organise their life. The parent may feel upset or annoyed at the state of the teenager's room, yet acknowledge that their child is becoming an adult and has some control over and responsibility for their private environment. So the sorts of relationships we use as a basis for judgment must be recognisable by us as holding between others, they cannot be just as we perceive them to be, and they will be the sorts of things that people can have different perspectives on.

In order to make objective judgments about actions and situations we need, therefore, to be able to recognise personal relationships objectively, to be able to get them right, to have a truth/judgment distinction in our assessment of personal relationships. If this is so then the personal relationships in a situation cannot be constituted by how they look to the individual; there would be no possibility of his being wrong about them. Also his understanding of personal relationships in general cannot be based on his understanding of his relationships with others. To get the personal relationships in a particular situation right then, what an individual thinker needs is to have an understanding of what it is to be a friend, colleague or family member that does not solely depend either on how he sees such relationships, or on what it is like for him to be a friend, colleague or family member. There are two reasons for the second restriction. Firstly, the thinker would be unable to make any judgments about relations between others, which would affect his judgments about others' actions and his decision-making about situations where more than his own relations to others were

involved, and secondly he would be unable to compare and prioritise his own relationships even where only these were involved in decision-making.

To take the first case. If a relationship were not just merely recognisable from the individual's perspective, but constituted by how it looked from that perspective, it could not serve as a basis for personal judgment in any situations in which that individual was not part of the relationship concerned. They would have no concept of what it is to be a friend, but only what it is to be their friend, or what it is for them to be a friend. The individual could only understand relationships in which they were involved, and only those could form the basis of judgments about what to do, only those would be relationships at all. Then, however, they would have no basis for deciding what to do in situations where more than their relationships with others are involved. If those are friends wrestling I should not interfere, if they are muggers attacking a victim, perhaps I should. But if all I know about relationships is my type of relationships, if relationships are only relationships because I am part of them, then those others are not related at all and I cannot decide what to do in that situation. Most situations in which we have to make decisions involve relations between others as well as between ourselves and others, so we have to be able to get the relationships between others right as well as the ones we are involved in.

Furthermore, it is not only our own reasons for making decisions that we criticise, we also judge the actions of others, and sometimes use them as a basis for our own decisions. Here again, someone for whom relationships were constituted by how they looked from his perspective would have no basis for judgments about what others ought to do in particular situations, because they would not be involved in the same sorts of situations and relationships that he was, or more strongly, would not be involved in relationships at all. If we are to be able to base judgments on personal relationships, then those relationships have to be to some extent independent of the people who are part of them. If I can compare my friendship with Julie with some

other friendship, then friendship as a relationship, does not depend on the relationship between me and Julie or the one between those other people. Personal relationships are relationships between people that to some extent disregard which particular people they are between. Friendships can occur between many different people, and understanding that some relationship is a friendship does not depend only on who the friends are and how they feel about each other. There are friendships between David and Jonathan or Achilles and Patrocles, that do not depend solely on David or Jonathan or Achilles or Patrocles or their understanding of or feelings about their relationships for these being friendships. It is not that it is a relationship between David and Jonathon that makes it a friendship, nor is it their recognition of their friendship that makes it one, it is because it is a token of a type of relationship that it is a friendship. So an understanding of the relationships to be used as a basis for decisions about what to do in situations cannot be constituted by how those relationships looks to the decision-maker.

The second concern is that even when I am considering situations where the only relevant relationships are my own relationships to others, it is hard to see how my relationships, if they are the only ones there are, and are constituted by how they look to me, could guide me in their future conduct. It may be that the history of a particular relationship involving commitments and responsibilities will raise expectations about future behaviour, will indicate how I should continue to behave if the relationship is to have some sort of consistency and coherence. This, however, would only be sufficient, if indeed it were, if that was the only relationship I was involved in. In fact we have a variety of relationships, both with different individuals and with the same individual. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, a couple may also be working in the same company. If conflicts arise between the two relationships it is not clear to me how consideration of them alone can guide my decision-making. How am I to compare them? And if the situation involves relationships with different people, how do I compare these to decide what to do? If I am torn between baby-sitting for my

friend Julie as I promised to do, and going to Casualty with my son who has broken his arm, how can considering the individual relationships and what they require of me help? One requires that I go to Casualty and the other that I baby-sit. It may be obvious what to do, but the reasons that I have for deciding one way will be to do with comparing the relationships as types. I will decide because, in this context, caring for my son is more important than caring for someone else's son. And this is not just based on feeling more strongly about my son than Julie's. Under other circumstances, where Julie's needs are greater than David's, she has to go into hospital, whereas David would prefer me rather than his father to read his bedtime story, the friendship we have and the promise I made will win out against my son's needs.

Decision-making then which requires consideration of others relations to one another and the comparison or prioritising of the decision-makers relations to others requires that relationships be constituted by something other than how things look to the decision-maker. What is needed here is objectivity on the same pattern as for spatial relations. It is only if the relationships between myself and others are of the same type as the relationships others have between themselves, that I can make the comparisons necessary for judgment and decision-making. As in the spatial relationships `to the left of' is a relationship that is of the same type when it holds between a thinker and some object as when it holds between any two objects, so with personal relationships, friendship as it holds between a thinker and others is the same type of relationship as a friendship between two other people. If it were not then there would be no possibility of comparison between relationships, they would be incommensurable. Even the history of the relationship would be no guide as to future behaviour because as it changed the subjects conception of it would change and thus it would cease to be the same relationship if it was constituted solely by the subjects conception of it. Only if a relationship was thought of as entirely static and unchanging could its past be a guide for future conduct within it, and this would depend on the subject's conception of it not changing. If the subject's conception of it changed it would become a new

relationship and could be no guide for behaviour or decision-making. It is likely, however, that how we act within a relationship changes our conception of it. Actions strengthen or weaken relationships, the more I do with or for my friend, the stronger our friendship becomes, its nature changes and so does our understanding of it. I would argue that the understanding changes because the nature changes, but if it is held that the understanding of the relationship constitutes its nature, it still seems likely that the things we do within a relationship change how we understand it and therefore, on this account, change its nature and it could no longer serve as a guide to future decisions.

So what is it that constitutes a personal relationship? I claimed above that the relationship is the basis for deciding what to do in a situation because it is made up of commitments, responsibilities and expectations, that these are its essential components. If this is so then types of relationship will be constituted by types of responsibilities, commitments and expectations. How could my past behaviour to my friend Julie lead to expectations of particular patterns of future behaviour, unless it was itself an indication that the relationship was of a particular type. It is because I have behaved as a friend does towards Julie that she can continue to expect me to behave as a friend would, and that I can consult, at least on difficult occasions, the patterns of friendship behaviour to guide my future behaviour. It is because Julie is a friend not a lover, that it is no threat to our friendship for both of us to have other friends, in a way that it might be if we were lovers. The type of relationship, as well as the growth and history of the particular relationship, has something to tell us about what is behaviour appropriate to it. This sounds like a rather formal set of procedures for what usually happens in a friendship, but all I am really claiming is that for the recognition of personal relationships to play the role I claim for it in judgment or decision making, the relationships need to be identifiable objectively, from a wider basis than that available to the individual's personal experience. I need to be able to disregard my egocentric perspective, to regard myself as a person amongst others,

whose relationships with others are subject to the same sorts of constraints, the commitments, responsibilities expectations appropriate to it, as the relationships that I recognise hold between other people.

So an objective understanding of personal relations such as friendship requires that we understand not just what it is to be friendly with some particular person, but what it is in general for people to be friends. For a relationship to be a friendship there need to be various commitments, responsibilities and expectations which hold between the people who are friends. This must be the case if the friendship is to be something that gives us reasons for making the judgments and decisions we do in a situation. These commitments, responsibilities and expectations will hold in any relation which is a friendship, regardless of who the people involved are. So any relationship will be the same type of relationship regardless of whether it is recognised as one of the thinker's relationships to others or as one that relates others to each other but not to the thinker, provided that it is constituted by the same type of commitments, responsibilities and expectations. It is interesting to note that if these commitments, responsibilities and expectations do in fact constitute relationships, then it may be possible for it to come as a surprise to someone that the relationship they have with another is a friendship; they will be engaged in such a relationship regardless of whether they have thought of it that way or not, precisely because they have certain commitments, responsibilities and expectations.

A result of this understanding of relationships as constituted by the commitments, responsibilities and expectations which are the basis for judgment and decision-making is that others, as well as the thinker, will be able to recognise the relationship as the one it is. That is the relationship will not be constituted by peoples recognition of it, their recognition of it will be a result of its constitution. It will be the sort of thing that can be recognised by other people than those who are part of it. This suggests that the objective understanding we need to be able to identify even our own

personal relationships is an understanding that can disregard our own particular perspective on a relationship and recognise it as the same sort of relationship that others can be part of, constituted by commitments, responsibilities and expectations, and as a consequence recognisable by others. This understanding is an understanding from no particular perspective because it can disregard the thinker's perspective. It does not require adopting another point of view, but it does require understanding the relationship as something that is potentially comprehensible by others because of the sort of thing it is.

To be able to identify relationships, therefore, even our own relationships, and to use them as a basis for decision-making and judgment, we need an objective understanding of personal relationships. This is one which is independent of the subject's perspective in the sense that the objective understanding of spatial relationships was independent of the subject's perspective; the nature of the relationship does not depend on the subject's perception of it so that disregarding the subject's perspective does not change the nature of the relationship. This understanding favours no particular perspective, every location in personal space is represented in the same way as every other one, and there is no favoured vantage point. Do we, however, need an egocentric understanding to be able to attain this objectivity, and do we acquire this understanding in a similar way to the way we acquire an egocentric spatial understanding?

5.4 Egocentric Personal Understanding

We saw that in the spatial case, to be credited with possessing an objective understanding we had both to be able to bring our egocentric understanding into coincidence with it, and to understand the spatial relations in terms of our causal interaction of the sort that we could have with objects in our egocentric space. That is, to use the objective understanding we had to be able to orient ourselves within it,

adopt a perspective within it, and doing this requires an understanding of spatial terms which depends on the causal relations between objects of which the thinker is one. In an analogous way I want to argue that to use an objective personal understanding we need to be able to orient ourselves in something like a personal space, to adopt a perspective within it, which requires and understanding of personal terms which depend on personal relationships being affected by the actions of the parties to those relationships. That is, as our understanding of spatial terms and relationships depends on an understanding of how objects can affect one another causally, our understanding of personal terms and relationships depends on an understanding of how parties to a relationship can affect one another and the relationships between them.

If the objective personal understanding is one that represents personal relationships from no favoured perspective, but as potentially recognisable from other perspectives, then to make any use of it we surely need to have the ability to adopt a perspective. If the objective personal understanding represents all perspectives equally, like the objective spatial understanding, it is not representing no perspective but many perspectives, and to use it we need to be able to adopt those perspectives. In the spatial case, to be able to use the objective understanding, to understand that this spatial relationship is of the same sort as that which obtains between others, we saw that we had to be able to locate and orient ourselves in a cognitive map. To understand that Bristol is to the west of London we have to understand what it would be like to be in London and that Bristol would then be to the West of us. Equally, if I am to be able to make judgments and decisions based on the relationships I and others are part of, then I must be able to understand what it is to be part of a relationship. If a relationship is objective, and is therefore the sort of thing that is recognisable from different perspectives, then to recognise a relationship we must be able to locate ourselves in a network of relationships as one of the members and understand what it would be to be involved in their relationships. To recognise that two people are

friends is to understand what it would be like to be one of them and to understand how the other is related to us.

So it sounds as if, to make use of our objective understanding of personal relationships, we need to be the sorts of things that engage in personal relationships. It might, however, be argued that we do not need to engage in relationships to understand them, we could make do with a theoretical understanding of relationships which does not require actually having engaged in such relationships. After all there are some types of relationships that any individual cannot or does not engage in; I cannot be a brother or a father. If I am to understand these relationships it must in some sense be a theoretical understanding that I have, so why should this not be true for all relationships? There are two sorts of problem here because there are two things I could mean by having a theoretical understanding. What I mean by it generally is an understanding in terms of rules rather than experience, but there are two ways that rules could be part of personal relationships. It could either be the case that the rules constitute the personal relationships, or that they attempt to capture them.[11] The first case would to be to consider personal relationships to be similar to the relationship between game players. If two people are playing chess or snakes and ladders there are

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[11]The following discussion has some similarity with Rawls' summary and practice conceptions of rules (see 'Two Concepts of Rules', *Philosophical Review*, 64 (Jan 55), p.3-32). However, although Rawls practice conception of rules is like my constitutive rules, the difference is that Rawls does not envisage them, as Wright might, as operating in isolation from the possibility of the practice changing in response to some legislative decision. A theoretical understanding, in my terms, is meant to be one which subjects could have without ever engaging in relationships. In this case constitutive rules would be all there was to the relationship, and this would rule out the possibility of the nature of the relationship forcing a change on the rules. In Rawls case, what forces a change of practice, and therefore of relationships, would be something like a recognition that the practice did not best fit the legislative moral principles, which it might be too difficult to apply in the individual cases. Since I do not believe that principles are primary, but relationships, this route is not one I would take, and therefore I cannot hold that we operate on the basis of practices which constitute relationships. This is why I prefer Rawls' summary conception of rules, but do not lose sight of the fact that there are both legislative and judicial functions in moral decision-making, which might be put in terms of judging respectively whether the discourse's discipline was the right one for its subject matter or whether decisions were in accord with the discipline of the discourse.

rules that tell them the sorts of things they can and cannot do, the moves they can make, perhaps the time they are allowed, and their relationship is limited to these rules. In fact I think even this model is inadequate because there are many rules which are implicit in our understanding of how games are played which are not part of the rules of the game; for example, that we should obey the rules of the game. Nonetheless in this sort of picture the rules of a relationship would be something created by society perhaps, but would constitute the relationship. As in the game playing case, what was covered by the rules would be all there was to the relationship. We would not be understanding the relationship as something that exists in its own right, but as something that is created by and limited to the rules. In the second case the model would be more like the scientific enterprise, that relationships exist in their own right and that the rules are our attempt to capture them, to say what they are like. In this case the question would be whether such relationships can be captured by rules and whether it would always be a provisional understanding we had, as is the case in scientific understanding. In the first case the rules are laid down in advance of the relationships, in the second the relationships are primary. I think there are problems with both pictures individually, and some that apply equally to both.

In both cases the idea is that the relationship is, or is discovered to be, equivalent to a set of rules. Perhaps we could feed into a computer the commitments, responsibilities and expectations of various types of personal relationships and expect it to tell us what to do in various situations. Could the commitments, responsibilities and expectations of a relationship be reduced to a set of rules which we could learn in order to decide what to do in a situation? There are two things wrong with this picture I think and they may both be part of the same point. The first is the idea that commitments, responsibilities and expectations are the sorts of things that could be fed into a computer as sets of rules, and the second is that what comes out of the computer may tell us what we should do but need not motivate us to do it. Both of these objections are connected with the nature of personal relations and what it is to understand them.

In terms of the analogy drawn with spatial relationships, this is the second basis of the need for an egocentric understanding. The nature of spatial relationships is such that we cannot understand them properly if we are not the sorts of things that engage in them. What I now want to consider is whether such a claim can be sustained with reference to personal relationships.

5.5 The Nature of Personal Relationships

I have argued above that personal relationships are constituted by their commitments, responsibilities and expectations because only if these were essential to such relationships could those relationships give reasons for acting as they do. Further, in order to possess an objective understanding of these relationships, an understanding that encompasses a variety of perspectives on them, we need to be able to have a perspective on relationships. Having a perspective on personal relationships is understanding what it is to be part of a relationship, understanding what you are committed to in that relationship, what others who are part of that relationship can expect of you. But why should this not be the sort of thing that can be reduced to a set of rules? Many personal relationships have sets of rules attached to them. My relations with fellow club members, fellow citizens, my supervisor, students and colleagues are all rule-governed to some extent.

The first thing to notice about these sorts of rule governed relationships is that the rules provide a necessary minimum of behavioural constraints. They do not, and cannot, tell us what to do in every situation; human relationships and the situations they are part of are too rich, varied and complicated to have their every aspect covered by rules. It may, for example, be a rule of friendship in general to be loyal to a friend, but situations arise where loyalties to two different friends conflict, or the loyalty we feel to a friend conflicts with some other aspect of our relationship. The problem is that rules cannot be specified precisely enough to cover every particular situation. So

the rules of my club or work organisation do not tell me how to behave towards fellow members or colleagues in every situation, but set out minimum standards that ought to be conformed to. Even here there will be situations where it is accepted that the rules do not cover these circumstances and we are justified in breaking them. That is rules are not sufficient for governing what is appropriate behaviour under all circumstances. So my relationship to fellow members or colleagues must have some other constraints, something else that guides behaviour in those situations not covered by the rules. The point here is that relationships with fellow club members do seem to be the sorts of things that are understood to be something other than merely what the rules specify. If they were restricted to the rules then of course the rules would be adequate for dealing with them, but our experience of even limited relationships is that rules are not always adequate. They do not, for example, cover situations not envisaged by the rule makers, which nevertheless sometimes arise, or perhaps they do not take account of other relationships which members are a part of but which nevertheless affect their conduct towards fellow members. They could not, in fact do this sort of thing. To take into account all possible other relationships that members were involved in, or any possible change of circumstances of the club, would seem to involve an infinite number of *ceteris paribus* clauses for any rule. That is why the rules are in fact regarded as a set of provisional minimum standards, to be obeyed in most circumstances by most members, perhaps regarded as something that members should aspire to. So if we try to regard relationships as constituted by rules, even in those cases that come closest to the ideal we find that our idea of such relationships is richer than what would be generated by the rules, and that even if it were not rules could not take sufficient account of the complexity of human circumstances.

Another important point is that if the rules constitute the relationship then we have a problem with the development of relationships and with non-standard relationships. If relationships are consitituted by rules we cannot say that a relationship develops and then we create rules to control it, that would be to get things the wrong way round.

We are therefore limited to relationships for which we already have rules, and it appears that there can be no aspects of a relationship that are not rule-governed. What it is to be in such a relationship is to follow the rules, if there are no rules there is no relationship. This is contrary to our ordinary understanding of relationships as things that grow and develop, that change to suit situations, that may not conform to others' views of them. This latter will not be a problem if the relationship comes first, since others can come to recognise it as they come to recognise the commitments, responsibilities and expectations that develop along with it. If the relationship comes into being, grows and develops we may recognise that it has something in common with other relationships, some of its commitments, responsibilities and expectations may be similar to those of other relationships and we will be able to say that this is a type of friendship or rivalry. This, however, is to take the second sort of picture, to understand relationships as primary and the rules as attempting to capture them. If the relationship is constituted by rules it is hard to see how it might develop rather than spring full blown to life, or how it might change gradually from one sort of relationship to another. Enemies do sometimes become friends, but rarely is it a radical overnight change, it is a gradual process to do with coming to know one another, with the relationship changing, perhaps imperceptibly.

If this is what relationships are like, things that change and develop, where each one may be different from others of its type, then even though there are types, and perhaps some patterns of appropriate behaviour can be extracted from recognition of such types, in the case of personal relationships we seem to have a very different situation from what goes on in the physical sciences. There the assumption is that rules can be discovered that will govern physical relationships, despite the fact that different elements are involved on different occasions. Things can, of course, develop in accord with rules, that is presumably how plants grow and develop, and this sort of development can happen with personal relationships. However, personal relationships are things that can develop in ways that do not have to be in accord with rules, they

can move forward in ways that do not match with previous patterns and structures. If the situation in Northern Ireland is to be resolved it will have to be because people can find new ways of living together that are not determined by their previous patterns and structures of behaviour, and although this may be difficult, we do not think it impossible. People can change their ways of behaving and relating to others in new and original ways. The assumption of the natural sciences is that the elements involved have no individuality and cannot affect the generalisations being made, they cannot choose to behave differently. One of the problems with the social sciences in general as a scientific enterprise, is that its elements are individuals who can decide not to conform to the rules we think we have discovered, they are not interchangeable, indistinguishable, mindless components and can develop new ways of behaving and relating. Surely the problem with trying to regard personal relationships as conforming to general descriptive rules is that this does not take enough account of the individuality of different people and their situations. That is not to say that we cannot discover some patterns of behaviour which we might use as a guide in other situations, but it could only be that, a guide, not something that forced us to behave in particular ways.

So an understanding of relationships as constituted by rules fails to fit with our conception of relationships not as fixed static things but as things that grow and develop in unexpected ways. Even if relationships were static, however, the overlapping and interaction of relationships that people are involved in and their changing situations would preclude rules being able to deal with their complexity. If, however, the relationships are not constituted by rules but our understanding of them is supposed to be capturable in rules, then we find that the particularity of personal relationships is what is important in considering how to respond to them, and then, although we may detect patterns of behaviour that can help our deliberations, rules are too general to provide specific solutions. So it seems that a theoretical understanding of relationships in terms either of constitutive or descriptive rules will always be

inadequate for the sorts of decisions and judgments we have to make with regard to personal relationships.

Further how an individual responds to a relationship depends on how committed they are to the relationship and what responsibilities they feel to the others involved. The problem here is not just that rules cannot be adequate to the complexities of personal relationships but that rules do not provide motivation, whereas the commitments, responsibilities and expectations of a relationship do. The rules of a club only provide motivation in conjunction with something else, perhaps the desire to remain a member of that club. Commitments, responsibilities and expectations, however, are not just theoretical reasons for action they are practical ones that motivate us to act. As Aristotle points out in the Nicomachean Ethics[12], the difference between practical reasoning and theoretical reasoning is that the former results in action, not just affirmation of a conclusion. To be committed to someone, or to a relationship, to acknowledge its responsibilities, is not just to know what is appropriate behaviour to that relationship, it is to want to engage in that behaviour. That is, personal relationships as well as justifying how we act give us reasons to act that motivate. `I did it because she's my friend' is a reason for acting in both senses, it tells us what justifies the person's action and why they felt moved to act that way. It is my claim that recognising a relationship as one that makes claims on us means not just theoretically identifying the claims it makes, but feeling the pull of those claims. In order for a particular relationship to be a basis for acting in a particular way for an individual, he must not only recognise what he has reason to do but also feel moved to do that. So personal relationships could be said to give rise to the desires that the Humean model would use to explain action. But the dependence is this way round. It is because we are part of relationships that are constituted by commitments.

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[12]See for example Book VII, ch 3, 1147a27-8.

responsibilities and expectations that the desires and beliefs can be identified, not that we have desires for and beliefs about friendships antecedently to being friends.

This point has a special significance if personal relationships are to have a chance of being sufficient for morality. Although I am avoiding talking specifically about morality as such, as Mackie[13] pointed out, moral properties are queer in that they motivate us to act. If relationships and their commitments did not do this, then they would fail to have the distinctive quality, the `ought-to-be-done-ness' as Mackie puts it, that belong to moral qualities. In this respect they would be insufficient for morality. In addition to this problem, however, we would have the problem of finding something else that provided the motivation for action. If we claim that there are moral principles or rules, but they do not provide motivation for our action, we either need a meta-level reason for following these rules or principles, which threatens a regress (what motivates us to follow these meta-rules?), or we need to bring in some other factor to account for our motivation. This is a recurrence of the problem posed for the cognitivist by Dancy that I noted at the start of the chapter. Either our beliefs about relationships will have to motivate us, or we may have to add in something like desires to account for motivation. If we adopt the second option this raises the problem, which I shall address in the next section, of how these desires could arise and how we could individuate them if they were independent of the relationships we were part of. Motivation here is not concerned with why this set of rules rather than another, but with why, even if we have adopted a set of rules, we will feel moved to act in a particular way. Rules only tell us what to do not why we should obey them. If we had a set of rules we could perhaps programme them into a computer and get the answers to our problems out of it. In such a case the computer might be said to know what the rules were and, supposing they were comprehensive, could provide the right answer about what to do without feeling in the least moved to do that.

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[13]J L Mackie, *Ethics: inventing right and wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) p.38 and following.

So my claim is that a theoretical understanding of personal relationships is inadequate because it is not rich enough to provide guidance in the situations we find ourselves in, because the relationships we hold with one another are themselves too variable and adaptable to be consitituted by rules, and because such rules would not provide the motivations to act. If, as I claim, the commitments, responsibilities and expectations of a relationship do provide this motivation, then I shall have to explain why it is that some people can apparently have a theoretical understanding of relationships without feeling motivated to act by it. That is I shall have to explain how someone can be weak willed, or not feel the pull of relationships at all; how anyone could understand what is expected of a friend, but not behave like one. First, however, I would like to consider the second possible solution to the problem of motivation noted above. This is the claim that relationships do not need to motivate us to act, that job can be done perfectly well by desires.

5.6 Desires

Someone could agree with me as far as the claim that we need to recognise relationships as a basis for action and judgment but argue that relationships do not play the starring role I have cast them in. We will need beliefs about relationships in order to provide the information on the basis of which we act, but what makes us act, what provides the motivation for our action is desires. In order to explain why people do what they do we do not need to suppose that people are motivated by relationships whose commitments, responsibilities and expectations they have to learn to recognise. This would be to suppose an unnecessary ontology, that of relationships, whereas all we really need to explain action is people and their desires. We will perhaps still need some understanding of relationships, that is we will need to know what to do in a situation, as well as being motivated to do it, but relationships would then be something invented by societies or communities and constituted by a set of rules

Thus, for example, in the case of the Good Samaritan what motivates him to act is a desire of some sort, and what it is appropriate to do in that situation is given by some set of rules. Of course if we were to accept this sort of explanation we have already lost the special ought-to-be-done-ness of moral properties. It will not be anything about the situation we find ourselves in that will motivate us to act, it will be our desires that do this. Putting this aside however and ignoring for the moment my argument that any set of rules is inadequate for deciding what to do, there is still a problem with the desire part of the model. If we suppose an individual has theoretical reasoning to tell him what to do in a situation and a desire to motivate him, how would this work and what sort of desires would he need?

One way of thinking of it might be that the individual has a general desire for pleasure and happiness. The individual's desires are selfish and he only does unselfish acts because he has a desire for approval, or a desire to conform. But then he needs to know how to conform. That is he must be able to recognise appropriate behaviour in situations, and therefore recognise relationships and know what to do in such a relationship (i.e. relationship and it's rules). The first problem we encounter is that if this is what moral behaviour amounts to then there is no distinction between virtuous behaviour and simulated virtuous behaviour. We make use of the notion of simulated virtue in moral discourse, that is of doing the right things but with the wrong motivation. For example, I help my friend not out of concern for her but because it will make me look good. In the case of moral behaviour as conforming to a set of rules because conformity satisfies my desires, the wrong motivation must be located in the desire part of the explanation of action: that is simulated virtue must be acting because of the wrong desire. But what is a wrong desire here? We do not have different types of desires, there is only one desire, a general desire for approval. This desire cannot be the wrong desire under such conditions because it is the only sort of desire there is, any desire here is the individual subject's desire for pleasure or approval. So there is no possibility of doing the right thing for the wrong reason.

except possibly for incorrect reasoning leading to the correct conclusion which is not simulated virtue; we will always either be doing the wrong thing, we will be mistaken about what action is appropriate, or if we do the right thing it has to be for the right reason. The only way the reason could be wrong would be if there were different sorts of desires and we were acting on the basis of an inappropriate desire.

Furthermore, if this simple model of a desire for pleasure in terms of approval or lack of disapproval is the reason for action, then there are problems with criticism, comparison and disagreement. If what gives reasons for action is desires and sets of rules for any relationships, then the individual's response to a situation can be wrong either on the grounds of being mistaken about the rules for that situation, or because he would gain more pleasure from failing to conform than from conforming. The former does not appear to be a case for moral condemnation, however. Someone who is ignorant of how to behave in a particular situation may be pitied for his poor upbringing, but is not generally thought to be blameworthy. It is rather like playing a game and being mistaken about the rules. If you make an illegal move out of ignorance you are not condemned in the way that you are if you know the rules but try to cheat because your desire to win is overridden by your desire to play fairly. The latter case, however, is that of weakness of will, something that we do generally condemn people for. Yet if our model of having good reasons for behaving a particular way in a situation is that our desire pushes us to behave that way, there does not seem to be room for this criticism. Whichever way our desire leads us to behave will be correct, unless we make room for the notion of different types of desire and their appropriateness to a situation.

The same problem affects both disagreement and comparison. We may disagree about the rules that apply to a situation, either between individuals or between communities, societies or cultures, and these will be ways of comparing behaviour in different situations. The debate I am considering here is not a debate due to ignorance

of the rules on the part of one disputant, it is a debate as to the correctness of the rules whose substance is agreed by the disputants; whether these rules are the right ones for this situation or relationship. If we just have a set of rules and we conform to them out of a general desire for approval, what would be the basis for discussion as to the correctness of the rules? These are not, after all, rules that are developed in response to the relationships themselves, since we are positing that we have no need for an ontology that includes relationships, the relationships would be constituted by the rules. So the basis for discussion would have to be people's desires. That is, a good reason for behaving this way in this sort of relationship is that it satisfies the desires of those involved. If we ask what these desires are, however, the answer would appear to be to do with the sort of relationship we are talking about. If the desires are just general desires to conform to rules, they cannot tell us which rules to conform to. So to use desires as a basis for deciding which set of rules is better in a particular situation we will need to use more specific desires. But if the desires need to be more specific, then they are the desires people have in that sort of situation, or even that particular situation, and then the desires derive from the situation and are individuated with respect to it. That is, the basis for deciding whether some behavioural rules are the right ones in a situation involving friendships is that people who are friends have desires that come from being involved in a friendship; particular desires that belong to friendship. To have disagreements about or make comparisons between the rules that apply in a situation, we need the desires that would have to act as a basis for the disagreement of comparison to be specific to that situation, not just a general desire to conform.

If, on the other hand, people agree about the rules but would still behave differently in the same situation, the sole reason for their different behaviour would be that their desires lead them in different directions. This, however, gives no grounds for saying that one's actions were better in this situation than the other's, or that the same person changed his moral position between two occasions where he behaved differently

because of different desires. The only possible reason for criticism or comparison would be if we could claim that these people were not acting from some general desire for pleasure or approval, but from more specific desires, and that they could be criticised, or could compare their actions, on the basis of whether the desires were the right sort of desires, the ones appropriate to the situation.

So if action is explained in terms of rule-governed situations and desires that motivate, then criticism of action in moral terms is not possible either about the rules governing a situation, or about the desires, without supposing that the desires that motivate us, and that ground the rules governing relationships or situations are desires that are specific to those situations or relationships, rather than general desires. Thus instead of a general desire for pleasure or approval being the reason why we act in particular ways, it will have to be specific desires such as the desire to please a friend or to help a neighbour. These more specific desires allow the distinction between doing the right thing for right or wrong reasons, since the right reason for doing something for my friend will be a desire to give my friend pleasure not to acquire a good standing in the neighbourhood. Similarly they will allow discussion of the right ways of behaving in situations in terms of the specific desires of those involved in those situation, and criticism and comparison of behaviour in similar situations can be based on whether the right desires were being brought into play as the motive for behaving that way.

However, if we are going to base our reasoning about behaviour on an ontology of specific desires, the desire to please a friend, to help a neighbour, to encourage a student, to protect a child, or indeed to harm an enemy, to beat a rival, or to annoy an antagonist, we have to ask how those desires develop, where we get them from, how they are discriminated. When we do this it is hard to see how they might have developed in the absence of the relationships they refer to. How does the desire to please a friend develop in the absence of friends, or the desire to protect a child or

beat a rival if I have no experience of children or rivalry? To have friends, children and rivals is to engage in relationships to which certain responses are recognised as appropriate and which give rise to desires to continue in, to enhance or to run down or discontinue the relationship. The appropriateness of responses might, to some extent, be learnt from second hand experience of relationships; stories, myths, reading or hearing about other's relationships. The desire to please a friend or beat a rival does not seem to be available second hand. We can learn from stories that it is appropriate to beat rivals or please friends, but surely the desire only comes from having a rival or a friend. That is, if we suppose that there are such things as relationships, we can account for desires which arise out of the relationships, but if we try to start with the desires, it is difficult to see how we could get such specific desires. It is because someone is a friend that we want to help them, we do not seem to have a desire to help a friend and then look around for someone to fix it on. Of course we may desire to have a friend, that is have a general desire for friendship, but again this is the sort of desire that arises from having had friends and missing the experience now. It is because I have had friends that I know that friendship is a desirable state and can aspire to it.

Similarly, if we have such specific desires, how do we individuate them in the absence of pre-existing relationships? If we explain someone's behaviour, or they explain their own behaviour in terms of a desire to help their friend, or harm their enemy, we could perhaps claim that these specific desires are individuated by being the ones that are aimed at the person who is the friend or enemy not the specific relationship that we are involved in with them. It will not be sufficient, however, just to identify them with respect to the person they are aimed at, since we may have different relationships with the same person. We explain Macbeth's killing of Duncan surely on the basis of his rivalry with Duncan, not on the basis that he is Duncan's subject, and yet he is still Duncan's subject until he kills him. So the desire that explains his action is individuated with respect to the particular relationship that is relevant to the action.

not just with respect to the individual it is aimed at. Also it can be the case that our relationships with others change and then the desires would change. If someone who was an enemy becomes a friend I will surely have desires to act differently towards that person, but the person may not have changed, they remain the same person. So the desires cannot be individuated just by being the ones I have towards that person. this will not account for the changed desires, it must be the changed relationship that accounts for this. If this is the case then, although we can and do use people's desires to explain their behaviour, to suppose that those desires can arise or can be individuated in the absence of involvement in a relationship which is productive of them is a mistake. That is, we can if we like explain people's behaviour in terms of desires, but this is a derivative sort of explanation, since these desires could not arise or be individuated without recourse to the relationship which gives rise to them. We can explain both the justification and motivation of action by identifying the relationship the agent is part of, without mentioning desires, but we cannot explain action in terms of beliefs and desires without referring those beliefs and desires back to the relationships.

So far, therefore, I have shown that we need an objective understanding of personal relationships in order to make objective judgments based on them. The relationships we understand, however, are the sorts of things that are recognisable from different perspectives, and, to be able to recognise the personal relationships between ourselves and others we need to be able to orient ourselves within that objective understanding, to adopt a perspective upon it. So to have an objective understanding we need to be able to adopt a perspective on personal relationships, to know what it is like to be part of such relationships. This, I argued, requires being involved in these sorts of relationships, not just having a theoretical understanding of them, partly because a theoretical understanding is not adequate to the complexities of such relationships, partly because it does not allow for changing and developing relationships, and partly because it does not provide motivation for action. In the case of the last problem I

have considered whether desires could provide the motivation required and concluded that, even if we assume that they do, we cannot consider them as primary but as dependent on an ontology of relationships since specific desires could not develop or be individuated independently of the relationships which give rise to them. This seems also to be the case with the commitments, responsibilities and expectations that I argue constitute personal relationships, and I would now like to consider them in more detail.

5.7 Commitments, responsibilities and expectations

One of my earlier objections to commitments responsibilities and expectations as rules constituting relationships was that they were not the right sorts of things to be expressed in terms of rules, that rules could not capture their richness and complexity or their motivating effect. To this should be added, I think, a further point that the commitments, responsibilities and expectations that belong to a relationship, as is the case with desires, cannot be specified or developed independently of the relationship. When we speak of rules capturing some situation or state of affairs, the model we have is of something like the scientific enterprise. There is something going on which we try to understand in terms of descriptive rules. We try to formulate a set of rules or laws which describe the regularities we discover going on around us, and I think that something of this sort does go on when we try to formulate general principles of behaviour. The picture of rules constituting a relationship, however, suggests that the rules are things that can be understood independently of the relationship, that we can describe various commitments, responsibilities and expectations independently of relationships.

The point I want to reiterate here is that if we are to understand relationships objectively, as things it is possible to have a perspective on, this means that we must understand what it is like to be involved in such a relationship, to feel the

commitments, responsibilities and expectations that make it up. To be committed or to have a responsibility is not to be in possession of the relevant rule and then to consider whether to obey it or not. If I can ask whether, despite knowing that this is what is involved in commitment, I shall do it, then I am not committed and I do not properly understand the commitment involved. To have the responsibility for bringing up a child is not just to know what to do but to be motivated and committed to doing that. The motivation is not some additional extra, something like a Humean desire that needs adding in to our beliefs to get us moving. We do not need to ask if someone who has accepted a responsibility, or is committed to a relationship, has a desire to act in the way those commitments and responsibilities require, because if they do not, then they are not committed, they have not accepted the responsibility. The pull is not a desire separate and separable from our commitments and responsibilities, although we can recognise it as an element of them. To have a relationship with its commitments and responsibilities is to feel the pull, to be motivated to act. It is precisely under those circumstances where people say that they know what to do but are not going to do it that we classify them as irresponsible and uncommitted. That is, what it is for something to be a commitment or a responsibility is for it to compel us, to motivate, to have a pull. If, however, responsibilities and commitments are the sorts of things that have a pull, we surely have to ask how we identify them, how we come to recognise them as such. The individual could not recognise the pull of relationships, requiring them to act in particular ways, to conform to particular patterns, if they had no experience of feeling both compelled to act and that others are compelled to act because of the personal relationships they and the others are part of. That is, we can know that a relationship has a pull without experiencing that particular relationship, but it is difficult to see how we could know what it is for a relationship to have a pull if we had not experienced the pull of relationships at all. Understanding commitment requires having commitments.

Actually being engaged in such personal relationships and feeling the pull of them is, I think, the equivalent of understanding spatial relationships because we are part of the causal network of physical space. If we do not understand expressions such as `to the left of' in terms of what will happen if we rotate in such a direction, or reach out in such a direction, we do not, on Evans' account understand them properly at all. I only understand `St. Mary's is to my left' if I know that I will see it if I rotate counter clockwise, or that I will bump into it if I move far enough in that direction. That is we can affect such relations by acting in particular ways, and we understand them as the sort of relations that can be so affected. It is part of what makes something a spatial relationship, that it can be changed by moving the elements of the relationship in space. To understand the inevitability of a world of spatially located, causally interacting objects, we need to be such a causally interacting spatially located object.

The analogy of this in terms of personal relationships is that, to understand a world of personally interacting and related subjects, we need to be such a personally interacting and related subject. Just as to understand spatial relations we need to understand how we can causally affect and be affected by spatially located objects and their spatial relations, so to understand personal relations we need to understand how we can affect and be affected by the participants in those relationships and thus change the relationships themselves. The claim here is that we do not properly understand, or do not have a proper conception of personal relationships if we think of them as abstracted from involvement. To fully understand what it is to be a friend, a lover, a colleague we have to conceive of those relationships as the sorts of ones we can be involved in, that have a pull to them, that require things of us, that are altered by our actions. My friendship with Julie can be strengthened by the things we do together or for each other, and weakened if we let each other down without good reason, where the sorts of reasons that are accepted are ones that are recognised as appropriate to the context of friendship. I do not just learn theoretically what are appropriate reasons, I learn in terms of the hurt expression on my friend's face, and the fact that she

withdraws from me. We see children learning the constraints and requirements of friendship as they switch who they are best friends with and who they are not speaking to from week to week. They may learn theoretically what behaviour is appropriate to friendship from models, myths and stories; from David and Jonathan, the Sword of Damocles and the Famous Five, but they can only learn from these because they recognise them as the same sorts of relationships as the ones they are involved in. They have experience of relationships that require things of them and that motivate them to fulfil those requirements, and only because of this could they understand that those characters in myths and stories are motivated by the same sorts of things and that is why the patterns of behaviour they exhibit are appropriate to their relationships. Without this understanding of relationships as things that have commitments, responsibilities and expectations that pull us in particular ways, they would neither be able to identify with the characters in the stories nor understand their reasons for behaving as they do. All these give us pictures of friendship, teach us what count as good and bad reasons for action within a friendship, show us how friendships are enhanced or diminished by ways of acting. But they surely only do this because we can relate such friendships to our own, because we know what it is like when a friend lets you down or backs you up, or what it is like to support or let a friend down. Such stories work because we can put ourselves in the place of the characters. We can only really conceive of personal relationships properly if we are the sorts of things that engage in them.

There is, however, a further point here. I have claimed that in order to have even a theoretical understanding that relationships have commitments, we need to have experience of being committed. I would also like to suggest that, as in the case of desires, that the general idea of commitment or responsibility is not enough either. These commitments and responsibilities are things that give reasons in both senses of the word, as I remarked above. They do not just provide the pull or motivation, they also provide the justification for action in situations. If that is the case, then

commitments and responsibilities need to be specific. We saw above that one of the problems with regarding general rules or principles as sufficient for the sorts of decisions and judgments we are making is that they are not specific enough. The distinctive feature of personal decisions and judgments is their specificity. Then, however, the reasons we use to justify our decisions and judgments must also be specific, and what gives us those reasons are the commitments and responsibilities of the relationships we are part of. This suggests that these too must be specific to those relationships. So developing and individuating those commitments and responsibilities is something that is specific to the particular relationship we are considering. That is, my various commitments to Julie are not just to Julie as a person, an individual, but to Julie as a friend, to Julie as a fellow Christian, to Julie as a woman, a mother, a colleague, and possibly many other relationships. I may have many relationships with Julie, and it will not provide an adequate explanation of my behaviour towards her on any particular occasion to say `I did it because she is Julie'. Sometimes I will have acted as a friend, sometimes as a fellow believer, sometimes in support of her as a colleague. The reasons and the motivation will be different on different occasions, and so the commitments and responsibilities which provide those reasons and that motivation need to be specific to the particular relationship involved. Neither will it be adequate to say that it was friendship in general, or the type of commitments I have to fellow believers or colleagues that motivated me and gave me reason to act. This is not specific enough either. My commitments to Julie do have to be recognisable as types of commitment, but nonetheless the commitment I have to Julie as a friend is still different to the commitments of my other friendships. Some will be stronger or weaker than others, some friendships will involve more or less time spent together, perhaps more or less discussion of personal problems. These commitments, therefore, will develop within the context of the particular relationship, and will only be capable of being individuated with respect to that context.[14]

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[14]This conception of commitments and responsibilities as specific to and individuated with respect to particular relationships can be seen to have similarities

So both the understanding of personal relationships as essentially involving commitments and responsibilities, understanding what it is to be committed and responsible, and developing and individuating those commitments and responsibilities requires involvement in such relationships. That is, to understand a world of personally interacting and related subjects, we need to be such a personally interacting and related subject; to understand commitments and responsibilities we need to develop them in the context of such relationships.

There are, however, still a couple of problems with this picture of relationships as made up of commitments and responsibilities which we need to experience in order to understand and be able to apply justificatory reasons for our actions and the motivation to carry them out.. The first might be put this way. In physical space there is only one set of relationships which we all experience. We all know how `behind' is related to us because we all experience things being behind us. So Evans can argue that we have a common experience that underlies and is responsible for the way we understand spatial relations.[15] But is the same true of personal relations? We may all experience being friends at one time or another, but we will not all experience being lovers, or brothers, for example. Will this mean that we will not be able to understand properly those relationships in which we are not involved? I think what is important here is that what our involvement in personal relationships gives us is an understanding that commitments and responsibilities have a pull. If this is so then we will be able to recognise that relationships in which we are not involved will be the

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to Dancy's particularism of reasons, see *Moral Reasons*, chapter 4, and D McNaughton's emphasis on sensitivity to the moral facts of a particular situation, see his *Moral Vision* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) particularly chapter 13.

[15]This may, of course, be an accident of our history. It seems quite likely that someone who had only ever lived in free fall, for example, would have a somewhat different understanding of spatial relations. `Above' and `below' would not have the same causal relations to the subject as they do for someone who is stationary with respect to a gravitational field, they may be closer to `left' and `right' than is the case for us.

same sort of things as the relationships in which we are involved, they will have a pull to them. Just as understanding any spatial relationship requires that we understand the causal consequences of action within that relationship without necessarily engaging in them, so understanding a personal relationship requires that we understand the personal consequences of action, that it affects the strength and pull of the relationship without necessarily being a part of that relationship. What is important is that every relationship has pull, has a motivating effect, and to conceive of a personal relationship as one that does not have a pull is to fail to understand it properly. I think that what is necessary here is that we experience some relationships, so that we know that the proper understanding of a relationship is that, among other things, it motivates. We understand that if we enter into a new relationship, it will bring commitments and responsibilities, it will pull us to behave in certain ways, and that the ways that we behave will affect the strength of that pull. In relationships we are not involved in we understand that there is a pull to them although we do not feel it in the same way as those who are involved, but we could not understand the pull of a relationship at all if we were not involved in any relationships ourselves. When I claim that a relationship is strengthened or weakened by our actions, is affected by our responses to it, I am claiming that it is the pull of the relationship that is affected here. When I do things with and for my friend and the relationship is strengthened, my commitment to it is increased and the demands it makes on me are strengthened. If I let it lapse or act to weaken it, then its pull may be lessened.

So we come to the second problem. If this is what it is like to be part of a personal relationship, how do we account for the person who does not seem to feel this pull. Where does the amoralist, someone who does not seem to feel the pull of personal relationships, who does not think of them as reasons for action, fit into this picture? What I am claiming is that, to have reasons for our actions that are based on the personal relationships we and others are engaged in, we have to be the sorts of things that engage in such relationships, not just view them theoretically. The amoralist

seems to be someone who does just that, who views them from the outside and asks why he should be expected to take this sort of thing into account when he acts. To this extent he fails to understand that relationships motivate others to act. He may claim that he understands that others do feel moved to act by the commitments and responsibilities of the relationship, but I would argue that in so far as he does not understand why they feel so moved, what it is to feel so moved, he does not really understand what commitments and responsibilities are and so does not really understand personal relationships. We have to be sure here that we are talking about someone who feels no such constraints on his actions, not about someone who feels different constraints from ours. The latter has reasons for actions that are based on his personal relationships, he just has different relationships, or prioritises them differently from ours. This is the person who would be asking why we feel moved by this sort of relationship rather than that sort. The amoralist, however, appears to be someone who does not think of personal relationships as reasons for acting and cannot understand why they pull us to act at all.

This, however, should not be a problem for my claims. I have claimed that if someone bases the reasons for his actions on the personal relationships involved in a situation, then he must be the sort of person who is actually engaged in personal relationships, not just a disengaged observer of such relationships. But this says nothing about the personal engagedness or otherwise of someone who does not admit such relationships as the basis for actions. The amoralist, as I am picturing him, is either someone who has come to reject personal relationships as reasons for acting, or never has seen them as such. It may be difficult to see how someone who is engaged in personal relationships and feels their pull can come to fail to acknowledge that pull as a reason for action. Nonetheless perhaps it could happen as the result of a major betrayal of a relationship and a consequent determination not to commit oneself to personal relationships any more. It may also be difficult to conceive of how someone could fail to be engaged in personal relationships in the first place, but if they have so

failed then they will not be able to conceive of such relationships as the sorts of things that might motivate people to act, and will therefore not base their actions on them. Both of these approaches are asking the question from the wrong viewpoint. I have not shown that everyone must be engaged in personal relationships, come to feel their pull and thus base their decisions-making on such relationships. I have only shown that if we do, as we seem to in moral discourse, base our decisions on personal relationships and their pull, then we must have experience of being engaged in such relationships. I feel the true amoralist is a very rare creature, and may be explicable in terms of the effects of early relationships, or lack of them, but he does not pose a problem for my position.

More of a problem is perhaps caused by weakness of will. In this case we have someone who does recognise the pull of a relationship but does not act on it. Perhaps they recognise that they should offer to help a friend in difficulty but do not because they don't feel like it. The problem here is that I have been arguing that the commitments responsibilities and expectations of relationships are things that motivate people, that compel them to act. Why do they not compel the weak-willed person? One possible solution is to say that, although personal relationships do motivate people to act they are not the only things that do so. For example, I claimed that there was a problem in individuating desires independently of the relationships they belonged to, but this would not seem to be a problem with selfish desires, since if they were, so to speak, dependent on a relationship with myself, that is one I cannot avoid having, so there is no problem with either the generation or individuation of selfish desires. It seems perfectly possible for us to have self interested desires that can conflict with the pull of personal relationships. In fact something along these lines must be what motivates the amoralist. It also seems perfectly consistent with what we take to be moral behaviour that some of our actions can be self interested and moral. We hold that people sometimes have a moral duty to do things that benefit them. We say that people owe it to themselves to develop this or that particular talent

or skill, or have a duty to keep themselves fit or preserve their health. On this picture the weak-willed person is mistaken about his priorities, the amoralist is right at one end of the scale of reasons for action and perhaps what some would call a saint is at the other end of the scale. The amoralist takes no account of personal relationships as reasons, most of us, including the weak-willed person take some account of relationships but have to balance them against other concerns, and the saint takes no account of anything but personal relationships. Actually I think both extremes are equally unlikely and undesirable, but that does not, I think, matter very much. What is important is that a large part of our judgment and decision-making takes place in the context of relationships with others, and to do this properly we need to be the kinds of things that are involved in such relationships. Only then will we understand such relationships properly as things that have a pull that is affected by how we respond to the relationships.

So the requirements of objectivity are that we have an understanding of personal relationships that is independent of the individual's subjective understanding of them and represents them as recognisable from a variety of perspectives. To use this objective understanding as a guide to action and judgment requires us to be able to adopt a perspective and feel the pull of the personal relationships that are part of that perspective. Thus we need both an objective and an egocentric understanding of personal relationships.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that neither of these modes of understanding is prior to the other, and that they are not understanding of different sorts of relationships. In fact, that is one reason why one is not prior to the other It is not that we need an egocentric perspective before we can have an objective understanding or *vice versa*, but that both are necessary for understanding the same personal relationships. In the spatial case our ability to engage in thought with a material world requires objectivity, the ability to be right or wrong about spatial relationships, a way

of understanding which can disregard our particular take on a situation and think of ourselves as objects among others, with the same sorts of causal and spatial relations. But this, in turn, requires that we are the sorts of things that can have causal and spatial relations with other things. Having a point of view is having a particular set of objective relationships to the objects in our immediate environment. Thus the objective and egocentric understanding of spatial relations are two sides of the same coin - like love and marriage `you can't have one without the other'.

Similarly for the egocentric and objective understanding of personal relationships. To engage in thought with others in an arena of personal relationships requires objectivity, the ability to be right or wrong about personal relations and to understand ourselves and our relationships as the same sorts of objects and relationships as we find others to be and engage in. That is, if we are to understand our own and others' personal relationships objectively, we have to understand them to be the same sorts of things. All relationships need to be viewed from a perspective, they are the sorts of things that people engage in and so the people engaged in them have a perspective on them. If the relationships I engage in can be viewed from my perspective, then the relationships others engage in can be viewed from their perspective. They are also relationships that are independent of that perspective. If we can be wrong about them and their requirements, then what they are and what they require does not depend on how they look to the subject, but on how they are, seen from this perspective, they are objective not subjective. To be objective they do not need to be perspectiveless, in fact they cannot be. If they were perspectiveless we could not have a perspective on them, we could not know what it was like to be part of them, and then the objective understanding would be of no use at all. Neither can we have a purely theoretical understanding of them, again because this ignores the importance of having a perspective, but also because such an understanding is inadequate for our conception of relationships and their pull. If these points of view and pull are not part of the objective understanding, then they will not be available to someone with that

understanding. But if points of view are part of the objective understanding, then only someone who knows what it is to have a point of view and feel the pull of a relationship will be able to make use of the objective understanding. And if the objective understanding of relationships is of their having a point of view and a pull, then having a point of view will be having objective relationships to others in our immediate environment, and feeling the pull of those relationships. That is, the relationships through which we engage with others and learn the meaning and pull of commitments and responsibilities will be objective relationships, ones to which a truth/judgment distinction applies, ones which we can be right or wrong about.

Further, to engage in the sorts of relationships that can be identified as of a particular type, a friendship for example, we have to be able to recognise relationships as conforming to some ideas of what is or ought to be involved in such relationships that is wider than the understanding the individuals involved have of their particular relationship. This is not to say that there are hard and fast rules as to what makes something a friendship, but that the sorts of relationships we are talking about, ones that have as necessary components responsibilities, expectations and commitments, are ones that fit into patterns of behaviour that are wider than our own experience of them. That is, there are no constitutive rules that make some relationships the type of relationship it is and determine behaviour within that relationship. There are, however, patterns of behaviour and interaction between people into which our relationships fit and within which they are recognisable as the types of relationship they are. Of course my friend and I have a particular relationship which will perhaps be unique, but if it is to be the basis for decisions about what to do that can be right or wrong, better or worse, then it must fit into a patterns of relationships and their associated behaviours that extends beyond my friend, me and our particular relationship to each other.

5.8 Patterns of Relationships

I want to talk a little more about patterns in personal relationships and their use in decisions about what to do. It might be argued, as I suggested above, that what to do, how to behave in a relationship is something that is appropriate to the way that the relationship has developed. The relationship has a history, it is made up of people interacting in various ways, it grows and develops, and is unique. So why do we need a pattern to help us decide what action is appropriate to it? Surely we have a case for action being in some sense consistent with what has gone before in this relationship as a sufficient constraint on future behaviour. I think that this is inadequate for two reasons. There are two things that we need if we are to engage in relationships and use them as a basis or reason for action. Firstly we need to learn how to do this sort of thing, that is how to engage in relationships and how to recognise them and their commitments and responsibilities, and secondly there needs to be the possibility of criticism and comparison. In fact the second is necessary for the first. We cannot learn about something unless we can criticise what we do and compare it to alternative behaviour.

I would like to suggest that moral education and the practice of moral criticism and comparison requires the identification of types and patterns of relationships. In education we introduce someone to ways of behaving that are appropriate to situations. This is as true in teaching mathematics as in personal education. We teach people how to recognise patterns and act accordingly. It is not just that this is the way we happen to do things, but that learning requires recognition of patterns. If every mathematical problem or relationship were unique there would be nothing to guide us about how to approach it, previous experience would be no help at all in solving the problem or deciding what to do in this relationship. This would be as true of others experience of situations as of my own, I could neither be taught or learn. If there are no recognisable patterns in solving mathematical problems, baking cakes or making

and sustaining personal relationships, then there seems no way of learning, there is nothing to point to to show how we should go on. It is not feasible to teach someone by suggesting that they look at this situation, this problem or this relationship and they will just see what to do. Even if we are not taught, if we learn from experience, we learn by recognising patterns. We decide what to do in this situation by comparing it with other similar situations and remembering what was the right or wrong thing to do there. In solving simultaneous equations you eliminate one variable; in baking cakes you mix the ingredients before cooking them; if you have promised to do something you should try your best to do it.

The first two examples suggest that what happens here is that we recognise a situation to which a formula applies and so we apply the formula. This is not necessary, or even desirable for all forms of learning and I do not want to suggest that learning about relationships is like that, that ways of behaving towards others and interacting with them could be reduced to a series of algorithms. We need not have a set of rules that may have to be adapted to different situations, but which will unequivocally tell us what to do once the situation has been correctly identified. This may be the case with simultaneous equations, but it does not have to be the case for everything we learn. There are other things we learn to do which are not reducible to written rules. When I learn to drive a car, for example, or play a musical instrument, there are some actions or sequences of actions which can be reduced to rules to some extent, to do with the mechanical operation of the car or instrument. I must declutch before I change gear, or I must cover these holes to play G#. There may also be other general requirements that can be suggested by general rules, what a driver needs to be aware of in a situation, generally how posture and breathing affect playing. But expertise is acquired not by following rules but by getting a feel for driving or playing, by practising in different situations and discovering what to do and what works best. This feel is for driving or playing as a whole, not as a series of isolated situations each governed by their own rules.

As I argued above (in section 5.5) this sort of behaviour goes beyond what can be written down and is not reducible to rules. Rules do not constitute personal relationships nor determine behaviour within them. Rules cannot account for unenvisaged situations and changes in circumstances, or for the complexity of the interaction of the personal relationships we are involved in. Rules and principles work in something like scientific predictions precisely because the situations involved can be considered as isolated from other influences, but practical personal situations are not like that. It is precisely the interaction and involvement with other personal relationships that makes decisions and judgments so difficult. When we learn to cope with such situations and relationships, if it cannot be by learning a set of rules then it must be either learning from others by example not instruction, it is shown not said, or learning from experience. Either way it still works on the basis of recognising types of relationships and situations, of learning to see patterns. This will be true of mathematics and cookery too at a certain level. Simple arithmetic and algebraic manipulation can be done by formula, but there comes a stage in trying to prove something, for example, when what you do is guided by recognising general similarities and knowing the sorts of things that will work. What you get a feel for, what you learn, is what to do in these sorts of situations, what to do if things are like this. You learn by comparing and contrasting situations, by trying out appropriate behaviour, and learning that sometimes the differences between situations are enough to make different behaviour appropriate, and why this is so.

Even when we are beyond the learning stage the patterns and types of relationships are something we need to use in decision-making. As I pointed out before, if all we ever had to consider was one relationship in isolation, then it might be that the nature of that relationship and the way it had developed may be a sufficient guide. But that is almost never the case. We live complicated lives involved in a variety of relationships, different ones with the same person, the same type with different

people, and many of our decisions about what to do are taken in circumstances where these various relationships pull in different directions. Or sometimes they reinforce one another. I may expect my husband to give more time to criticising my work academically because he is both an academic and my husband. To decide what to do we may need more than just our understanding of those particular relationships We need a feel for personal interaction that comes from being part of a variety of relationships and understanding what behaviour is appropriate in a variety of situations. These are, however, relationships like those that hold between others, and what is appropriate behaviour with respect to them is the same sort of behaviour that is appropriate with respect to other relationships of that type. Dancy, although a particularist who holds that each situation must be judged individually on its merits, nevertheless recognises the importance of experience in moral judgment. He says

> "Of course, a comparison with other cases may help us to decide how things are here, just as a long experience of car engines may help us to diagnose the fault this time. . . . it would be surprising if a long and varied moral experience did not serve to sharpen one's sensitivity for the future."[16]

This ability to recognise relationships as tokens of some type and make comparisons between them is also necessary for criticism, both of our own and of others decisions. If every situation were unique, there could be no criticism. Yet criticism too is a part of the sort of discourses we are considering. If we think that it would have been better or worse if we or others had acted differently, we have to be able to compare the actions in this situation with other, similar situations, and therefore to compare the relationships in those situations.

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[16]Dancy, p.63. The point here is being made in terms of the recognition of the situation and not particularly the appropriate behaviour. Dancy however makes a similar point about behaviour in terms of the particularists use of moral principles on p.67-8.

So education, criticism and decision-making in general require that we recognise relationships as being of some type, where the type has an effect on the decisions we make. Patterns or types of relationships can guide us in our behaviour, there are things it is appropriate to do because the relationships are of a particular type. Nevertheless the type of relationship does not give definitive reasons for action. To say a relationship is of a particular type is to give some indications of appropriate behaviour, to allow us to compare situations and see if they are similar enough that similar behaviour is appropriate. We decide what to do in a situation because the situation contains relationships of particular types in a particular configuration. We will have met those types of relationship before, but much will depend on the strength of the pull of these particular relationships compared to one another, and not only do we not seem to have a neat formula for deciding priorities in situations, but we cannot have. It is in this sense that situations are unique. We have never come across this exact combination of these relationships, each at this stage in their history before, but we have acquired a feel for how to behave in situations of this type.. So in deciding what to do, in using these relationships as reasons for the decisions we make, their type can only be a guide. Just as each driving situation is a new one and decisions have to be made each time, yet they are made on the basis of recognising the type of situation and assessing how similar it is to others of that type for them to be useful. So each personal situation is new, and yet decisions can be made using experience of previous similar situations and relationships.

Types of relation are used as reasons for action then, but we need to be careful as to how we think of them. These types of relationship have the same sorts of features as individual relationships, they give reasons to act both because of the sort of relationships they are, and because they motivate. David's being my son gives me the same sorts of reasons to act, both in the justificatory sense and the motivational sense, as anyone's being a son gives his mother reasons to act, although not precisely the

same reasons. The mother/son relationship is one I learn about from seeing it in action, from hearing stories, anecdotes and jokes about it. But the particular relationship I am in and the way it provides reasons for my actions is also dependent on the way it has developed between us. We have both built it up perhaps by using elements of the type of relationship as it is presented to us, but the particular mix of those elements and the ways we combine them with other things that become important in that relationship and how it fits into the other relationships we are involved in is what gives our particular mother/son relationship the justificatory and motivating force it has for our actions towards one another.

So there are two aspects of learning about and making moral decisions. The first is the ability to recognise our relationships as of a particular type, and that their being of this type may give some reasons for behaving in particular ways. The second is learning to recognise the individuality, the particularity, of a relationship, how it differs from others of its type, and how those differences may give reasons for acting in different ways. On my account of relationships as the basis of moral judgments and decisions we would need to be sensitive to the particular moral situation and the relationships involved, which suggests that part of our moral education and experience must help us recognise those types of relationship. The type of relationship will also give some guidance as to how to act, what sorts of behaviour are appropriate to it. It will not, however, determine how we should act. As I argued earlier, relationships can grow and develop in new and original ways, and therefore the behaviour appropriate to them may be different from what is appropriate to other relationships of that type. We also learn from past mistakes as well as successes. Recognition of the failure of some response to be appropriate to a type of relationship, or a particular one, is also a guide as to how to go forward in this case. In both cases a recognition of a relationship as a token of some type can guide us in how to act but does not determine how we act, each relationship is different and each situation is a different combination

of relationships. It is on the basis of the actual situation and its relationships that we are engaged in that we make our decisions and judgments.

5.9 Personal Relationships and Morality

I could not hope, in these closing sections, to provide a definitive account of what morality is and what exactly is its relationship to this structure of personal relationships that I have been discussing. I would like, however, to make some general suggestions as to how we might see an understanding of personal relationships as related to morality; the questions I posed right at the beginning of the chapter. There I asked whether recognition of these relationships was not only necessary for moral decision-making but sufficient for it; whether it would lead to general moral principles or to similarity of action in similar situations and whether some personal relationships were moral and others not. I am not sure whether the first two points are taken as definitive of morality or sufficient for it, but both certainly seem to be things that people associate with morality. In the case of similarity of action in similar situations, I hope it is obvious from the above discussion that I think that decision-making based on the recognition of personal relationships not only leads to but depends on at least recognition of the similarity of situations. If there were not such similarity we could neither learn nor decide on appropriate ways of behaving, not just in personal situations, but in any situation. So that I take it that recognising relationships and similarities between them is necessary as the basis for action. In the moral case it has often been assumed that this will lead to similarity of behaviour. While this may be the case in some of the areas we need to be trained in (if the engine stalls, switch off and start again), I do not think it is always the case in moral behaviour. This sort of constraint is not definitive of moral behaviour or decision-making. It depends, I think, on the ways in which situations and relationships are similar. My point is that it is the individuality of the situation that grounds the judgments we make. Sometimes situations will be similar enough that similar

although not identical, responses will be appropriate. Sometimes, however, the whole point of identifying the similarities will be to avoid making the mistakes made last time. And sometimes the recognition of similarity will also point out the differences that make a difference to how we should act. So although recognition of the similarity of situations and relationships is necessary, I do not think that this has to lead to similarity of decisions.

Is the other element, having general principles, definitive of morality? If what is essential to morality is having a set of general principle that can be applied in a variety of situations to find out what to do, then such principles do not themselves seem to be sufficient for morality, because they cannot tell what to do in situations where they conflict, and cannot take sufficient account of the complexity of overlapping and interacting personal relationships or their development and change. What to do in a situation does not seem to be the sort of thing that can be captured by a set of rules, and I have argued that while relationships, both as tokens and types, act as the basis, or give reasons for deciding what to do, they do not do so in terms of supplying rules or instructions. From this I hope it is clear that I do not regard morality as the possession of a set of rules to guide behaviour. This is not to deny that some guiding principles could be abstracted from consideration of different situations and relationships, but even here they would have to be principles that contained the concepts of relationships and their commitments and responsibilities. That is we could perhaps abstract some useful guidelines from particular situations, but they could not be abstracted enough that they disregarded the concept of relations as constituted by commitments and responsibilities. Thus a very general principle such as `Love thy neighbour as thyself' might be regarded as a guiding principle, but following it will require asking and answering questions about who my neighbour is and what my relationship with them commits me to.[17]

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[17]For similar points see Dancy, p.66-71, and McNaughton, p.201-203

Another alternative view is that morality is to do with acquiring virtues, building character. If this is what morality is I would want to ask why some character traits are virtues and others vices, why some sort of character is preferable to another. My answer here, I think, would be that what makes virtues virtuous, or what makes an excellent character, is to do with the ways we relate to other people. Virtues such as those suggested by Aristotle, generosity, courage and justice are all appropriate ways of behaving towards others or in situations where others are involved, and mean-spiritedness, cowardice and unfairness are not.[18] We may think them desirable for the individual, it may seem that the important part of my moral behaviour is acquiring the right sort of character, and that this matters for me as an individual, independently of how it affects my relations with others. This I think is mistaken, it is to regard one aspect of morality in isolation, without asking why this sort of character is desirable. It recognises the idea that a virtuous or excellent person is so because he possesses these traits, but ignores the idea that this is so because he is a person, someone who is involved in personal relationships.[19] It is also the case, I think, that it would be very hard to identify or acquire the various practical virtues, at least, without some reference to personal relationships. The same point can perhaps be made about them as can be made about desires, commitments and relationships. Such virtues cannot be acquired or practised by someone who is not already related to other people, and they are identified precisely by his behaviour towards others.

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[18]See *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans by J A K Thomson, rev by Hugh Tredennick, Introduction and Bibliography by Jonathon Barnes (London: Penguin Books, 1976)

[19]Aristotle of course argues that practice of these virtues is desirable because man's function is to be rational and the practical reasoning used in practicising virtuous behaviour is exercising or fulfilling man's function. If, however, we are reluctant, as I am, to accept this picture of what it is to be fully human, then we must provide some other reason why the behaviour we think virtuous is so.

The other line that can be taken on morality is that it is the application of some abstract and universal principle of reasoning. Now obviously I think that reasoning, in the case of personal relationships, should be objective, it should be the sort of reasoning that others can understand if they can understand the nature of the relationships we are involved in. It should fit in with other patterns of behaviour, and it should treat others as things like ourselves, who can be involved in such relationships, who are the recipients at least of commitments and responsibilities, if not always the makers of them. On the other hand I do not think that the reasons we have for acting are independent of the relationships we are engaged in, or could be. If there are rational subjects who do not engage in, or understand engaging in such relationships, then I would not expect them to understand or be able to use the sorts or reasoning involved. If abstract and universal reasoning requires that there be some notion of rationality that is independent of the environment people find themselves in and their explanation of their actions within that environment, then I think it requires too much. To return to the pictures introduced in chapter one, this sort of concept of abstract, universal reasoning seems to derive from the picture of the detached subject thinking about a separate world. If, however, we accept the second picture of a subject/world/concept interaction, then we must expect our rationality to fit inside this picture, not to be something independent of its constraints; to be particular and embedded in our understanding of our environment, not universal and abstracted from that environment.

My reply to the question of whether morality requires abstract principles or reasoning is that these are either inadequate for decision-making in the sphere of personal relationships, or that they impose too strict requirements. That is, that these are not definitive of morality. So what do I think morality is? That is a little hard to say. I am tempted to claim that it is anything to do with deciding what to do in situations which involve personal relationships, as is suggested above. Some would argue here that many of the relationships between people are in fact regulated or prescribed by

other things, they are legal, social religious or work relationships and are not particularly the concern of morality. I do have rules to tell me what to do as a citizen, as a church member, as a member of the university, so where does morality come in?

One way of looking at this might be to suggest that the relations between social, religious, legal and moral constraints is that what society, the law and religions attempt to do is to model or capture moral requirements, perhaps from different perspectives, in something like the way that scientific theories try to model or capture the material world and its relations. If this were the case it would perhaps explain why we feel that moral considerations can be stronger than, or override social, religious or legal requirements. We can have moral objections to social, religious or legal constraints. We sometimes feel that a particular law is wrong, that certain social conditions condoned by a society, or constraints laid down by religion are morally wrong. On the other hand it may be thought that this priority of the moral over the social, legal or religious is merely a modern way of looking at things. Our ancestors might well have claimed that it was more important to stick by your social obligations, despite qualms about them, than to disrupt the social order. Such phrases as `My country right or wrong' suggest that loyalty to ones country overrides personal morality. Or perhaps personal morality would not have been an appropriate phrase to use, some societies or groups may think the individual is not capable of deciding for themselves what is right, but should submit to the group's decisions about moral behaviour. The implication of the above position is that patriotism is a moral requirement, and perhaps that the unity of a country, confidence in it and commitment to it are all more important than whether its policies are right. And yet the distinction is made, my country can be wrong, and presumably wrong when measured against some standards. There is still a distinctions between the codes, rules and standards a country develops and their rightness. And the individual still has to make the decision whether to accept patriotism as a moral position or not. Ideologies that claim that the individual ought to follow the constraints of their system still say that they ought to,

not that they have no option or that they will. There is always a gap between what some group thinks should be the behaviour of its members, and what those members do, how they behave and think.

What I would like to suggest is that, although these distinctions are made, between a system and its rightness, or what the system claims the individual should do and what he or she decides to do, this is based not on a distinction in kind between moral and other discourses, but that the relationship between moral claims and social, religious or legal claims is that of truth to judgment. If the social, legal political and religious systems are all attempts to codify behaviour about how people should live together, behaviour based on personal relations, at least in some restricted spheres, then what forces us, our societies and communities to rethink these systems is that they have got it wrong. This is not claiming that there is some morality, defined as a system of rules or principles, which has got it right and everything should be measured against that, but that moral behaviour is the attempt to get our personal relationships right, and work out what behaviour is appropriate to them. Social, legal, religious and political systems all attempt to do this by setting up codes, rules and principles, and so all fall short. They try to capture the feel for acting in relationship with others that we all aim at and perhaps they succeed in setting up some minimum standards that cover the majority of cases, or the more common situations and relationships most of the time. But where they fail, as they must, what brings them up short is moral concerns, considerations of how this set of personal relationships cannot be addressed by the rules, the rules are not sufficient for them. That is, I am claiming that social, legal, religious and other personal relationships are all in the domain of the moral.

If I am right here, if what constitutes morality is the attempt to get personal relations right, to act appropriately with respect to them, then basing our behaviour on the relationships we are involved in, are part of, will in fact be sufficient for moral behaviour. Behaving appropriately in personal relationships, responding appropriately

to other people in a variety of situations requires having reasons for our behaviour that stand up to criticism. Learning what sort of reasons we can have and justify and continuing to practise decision-making based on such reasons requires that we recognise the individual relationships, and types of relationships involved in a situation, and what they require of us. This recognition of relationships needs to be both objective and egocentric, subject to truth constraints, and the sorts of things we can be part of and motivated by. These relationships provide us with reasons for acting the way we do and also the motivation, they have a pull to them. But if this is so then nothing more is needed to account for how and why we act in particular ways in personal relationships.

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